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# Spinster's Leaflets.

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Caroline W. Scheer  
1896.



# A SPINSTER'S LEAFLETS

WHEREIN IS WRITTEN THE HISTORY OF HER  
"DOORSTEP BABY," A FANCY WHICH IN  
TIME BECAME A FACT AND CHANGED A LIFE

BY

ALYN YATES KEITH

BOSTON  
LEE AND SHEPARD PUBLISHERS  
10 MILK STREET

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A SPINSTER'S LEAFLETS

ELECTROTYPING BY C. J. PETERS & SON

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TO  
ONE WHOM THE OLD HOUSE  
SHELTERED





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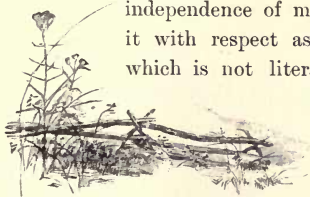
## A SPINSTER'S LEAFLETS

### I

My neighbors will tell you if you inquire of them, and possibly if you do not, that I live quite alone, which is not strictly true. Primarily I have my house, which is to me what the shell is to the turtle. It is a very old shell — as old, in



independence of my country. I speak of it with respect as the Century House, which is not literally true without the preface of a plus sign. Its roof is mossy, and the shingles that protect its



sides curl and fringe raggedly at the edges. I have seen the shell of a turtle bend along the thin margin when exposed too long to wet weather.

But if the house is not young neither am I, and we fit each other without a wrinkle.

The sun looks in at my kitchen-porch punctually every morning, without discredit to the almanac over the mantel, and hangs on the horizon with raised eyebrows for a last look at my bedroom window, where the morning-glories make a summer show that it would be hard to surpass. My sitting-room, lifted one step above the kitchen, like a sort of higher life, holds my fireplace, my cat, my corner cupboard, and my books. I name my fireplace first, because fire is to me a symbol of all life. When I draw the curtain of an autumn evening and light my fire, my world is at once peopled.

My cat is a link between the past that lives vigorously in my thoughts and the realm of books wherein the physical life is often lower than the spiritual. My books belong to the world of fancy, of faith, and of hope. But my cats are present realities — for they are in the plural though I named but one — that keep me close to the life of Nature who clothes her children according to her unadulterated taste. Mine are yellow, with a vigorous hue that suggests autumn in its prime. People who admire safrano roses have a way of cavilling at yellow cats, as in the last generation it was the custom to raise frivolous objections to red hair.

My cats are named Kittery and Cattery. The first was suggested by Joe, the little man who brings my daily half-pint of milk. He has just begun school, and geographical names take possession of him. Following



his suggestion I named the mother cat. She was simply That Cat before Joe's day; that is, the day of my obligation to him. She is the progenitress of many families, now scattered; a cat fond of her ease, of her will, and of mice caught for her in traps.

Once I tried to lose her, and hired Joe to carry her five miles away in the milk-wagon, and drop her near a good barn where she could make a living if she would. But she was back before him, with such a look of forgiveness on her hungry face that I took her in and went without milk in my tea. Three weeks afterwards Kittery was my abundant reward. She was a triplet; the others I do not speak of.

Kittery is another kind of cat. She is not only a fine mouser, but she can pounce upon a rat and kill it quicker than an authorized terrier; and she goes out at night, like a nineteenth-century Donna Quixote, to right the wrongs of the neighbors and mount guard over their corn-bins. In the morning, when her watch and ward are over, she comes and taps three times on my window, and I rise and take her in for a nap on the warm foot of my bed, at a little personal inconvenience. It is but a small reward for her scientific services, and a cheap way of showing regard for my townsfolk. I have known scores of human beings who were less neighborly and infinitely less interesting as individuals than she.

At table I set a chair for her, and she waits with composed dignity and the air of a trusted serving-maid until I push back my own chair and serve her myself by the kitchen fire. Occasionally she so far forgets her manners as to put up a beckoning paw which never touches the table; but one shake of my head reminds her that she holds her place for life subject to good conduct. And so she stands, or rather sits, just behind me, alert but not eager, biding her time. With Cattery it is far otherwise. What she cannot effect by stealth, she accomplishes by effrontery. Not a window, not a door, escapes her stretched neck and prying claws. She demands admission in a poor-relation sort of way, and takes it when refused even if her progress be partly stopped with the broom; a humiliation that she never recognizes nor resents.

But what can you expect of a cat in the first generation? She came to me a tramp, and insisted upon her rights with the level front of a Roman citizen. She snatched at bones, watched the pantry-door as a well-bred cat watches a mouse, and was forever laying plans to enter it ahead of me, her mistress by compulsion, and steal whatever her paws could compass without detection. Broken china caused her no pangs but physical ones. Her sense of honor was wholly in abeyance.

I must here confess that I was positively if not sinfully glad when she set her foot on a crystal heirloom

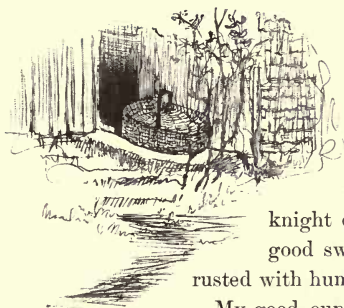
as she was investigating a tempting sweetbread that stood just above reach, and was laid up in sticking-plasters for a week. Once I had the misfortune to shut her paw in the crack of a door where she had insinuated it in the vain hope of being wanted within. When I hurried to release her she took advantage of my weak compunction, darted in, flew to the sitting-room, and covered my company easy-chair cushion with yellow hairs before I could overtake her. She is always setting traps for me that I fall into innocently. But my well-bred Kittery has educated me to think nobly of her race; and for her sake I tolerate the plebeian mother whom I never invite to my sitting-room, though I often find her skulking under my chair at table-time, which she calculates with the accuracy of a mathematician. One night she eluded me, usurped Kittery's chair, put out one thieving paw while I was blindly saying grace, and dragged from the platter my supper of broiled chicken-wing, which left a brown trail on my freshly ironed tablecloth; then, darting out to the kitchen like a yellow streak of light, she found the wood-house door in collusion, dashed through, and so out to the boundless universe.

I gave Kittery the remnant of my supper, by way of amends, put a chestnut-stick on the fire which had burned low with the unusual draught, and swallowed my cold tea and my chagrin with an effort. White

birch burns, singing as it consumes, with a gentle, lady-like flame creeping along the pretty bark speckled like a woodthrush's breast, daintily courtesying to every breath of air, and sending stars in advance up the black chimney throat to show the way. It makes a lovely fire to sit by with books or work. But if your spirit is "riled," a stout chestnut-stick is best. It growls and sputters and refuses to burn till you believe it and start for a bit of pine to help it along, when it snaps out some hidden live coal with such vigor that you lose sight of your grievance in lively concern for your property.



## II



BACKED into the north-east angle of my sitting-room stands my good corner cupboard. I use the adjective with discrimination. The

knight of old was proud of his good sword, which was probably rusted with human blood.

My good cupboard speaks to me only of peace and good cheer, and on its venerable shelves the past lives in unforgetting youth. All that I most prize of memory or tradition is stored here ; all that I can bestow by will. But upon whom ? I wish I knew. On the top shelf, beyond tip-toe reach of any chance sneak-thief, six solid-silver teaspoons lie rolled in fine old homespun linen, each marked "N. B." for my mother's grandmother. The rest of her silver was apportioned to kindred of differing degrees, as good English gold is doled out to ramifying branches of the Queen's family. Six other spoons, marked "T. C." for my father's

mother, who was named Thankful in an age when people had little material good to be thankful for, lie beside the first, in a box whittled from pine by some ingenious jackknife of unknown ownership.

Twelve smaller spoons, worn on the right-hand edge of the bowl and marked "A. N. R." for my own mother, I keep subject to call in a small japanned trap that I coveted in my childhood, and with them six tablespoons that were laid up for company as far back as I can remember, and which it seems almost sacrilegious to use commonly now. Beside these stands a notably ancient tea-caddy, unmarked, which I like to fancy came over in the Mayflower with the Aldens, who were in some unknown way connected with our family. I may have dreamed it, but there is in my mind a fading impression that my grandmother told me something of the sort in the days when I used to sit in her lap and wonder at everything.

The lowest shelf holds my china heirlooms, not a piece of which is nicked or cracked, although in daily use. My platters and dinner-plates of bright brown-and-white were a romance in crockery to my tender years, with their pictured lakes, whereon swans curved their poetic necks and waited to be fed by highborn ladies in ruffs and hoops, who were on the point of stepping out of a dozen summer arbors, all of the same pattern. Behind these are ranged for ornament my

grandmother's Lafayette plates in darkest blue and of most melancholy design, and a tall decanter of old Madeira wine long laid up for sickness.

My mother's cherished tea-set in gilt with pink sprigs looked so coquettish, so girlishly conscious beside this solemn array that I moved it some years ago to the shelf above, and spread it out to fill the space and to have the gayety all to itself. Old and young often do best apart. When the light at evening flickers on the little cups with their elbows out, I think of figures in a minuet. Above these and below the top shelf I have a curious array of useless old relics : pitchers with broken noses to the wall, vases that no longer hold water, cracked cups and cemented platters, and in the place of honor, the exact centre, a quart pewter tankard of incredible age. Most country-towns have a legend of some unhappy child small enough at birth to be put into a quart tankard.

But I stop the ears of my mind to any improbable stories of this kind.

On zero nights I even refuse to think of them ; for I have learned that one's thoughts can be controlled, not by thinking of all the Johns one ever knew, or reciting the alphabet backwards, or counting to one hundred, but simply by fixing them on some unalterable point too small to invite speculation.

My mythical babe in the tankard reminds me of my

dream that began years ago, when I thought I heard a child's cry in the night. I got up, lighted my bedroom candle, put on slippers and dressing-gown, and went to the doorstep where I had often read of babes being left, and with a reasonable expectation of finding one; but no such good fortune was in store for me.

It set me dreaming though, and I often waked suddenly, listening for the cry. I think now it was only wandering cats, that often give out a pathetic, human note in the night. Cattery often does it, though there isn't a hair of pathos in her whole make-up; so I am no more disturbed by sentimental pities. In time my dreams about babies ceased, and then began my day-dreaming.

Five years ago, when I went fourteen miles to town for a winter cloak at a time after midwinter when cloaks were low in price, I found a left-over Christmas card that I brought home and stood on my sitting-room mantel, where it is always before my eyes. I think that was really the beginning of my definite hopes, rather than the cry in the night. At least I prefer to think so. It is the picture of a yellow-haired little fellow standing in his nightgown before the fire. His profile shows against the dark wall, and the firelight is full in his face. He is holding both chubby hands out to the red warmth. Behind him a freezing moon looks through a diamond-paned window with holly

twigs above it, and makes the back of his little night-gown blue. The front of it is as yellow as the light on his face. I always long to gather him up in my lap and tuck my apron around his cold back and warm his pink little bare toes in my hands.

To me he is always "Philip, my King." If I ever find a baby on my doorstep, he shall be Philip. We read now and then of children deserted in the night and never called for. George MacDonald has a lovely story of a child found in that way.

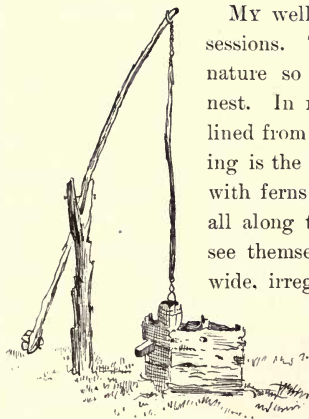
I have even thought that some poor mother might come here with a child and die, and I could rescue the little creature from the town. Still that would not seem so personally providential as a baby left on one's own doorstep. There could be no question about that. But no one seems disposed to leave children in our town; and if any one should do so, the child might prove too old. A "long baby" is my heart's desire, and I need not scruple to say that I lay up all suggestions from mothers with regard to the cut and material of small clothing. My own "amber gods" were long since bleached and laid aside in my choicest drawer with the slips and petticoats of dead generations. I treasure rolls of soft flannel, and some years ago I bought yards of pretty muslin, pretending it was for aprons for myself. But it has grown yellow, and I shall not bleach it yet.

There have been times when living alone was less easy than it is now. Once the scamper of a mouse overhead would freeze my blood, and for years I had a feeling that I might surprise a burglar behind my pantry-door, or walk through a ghost in the garret of an evening at any time.

Those who always swing in rocking-chairs don't know the feel of a good, sturdy back leaning on its own muscles. Neither do they know the pain of attainment. I have noticed that I can't empty all the wine out of a decanter, or all the gravy off a platter even. A little runs back and keeps the old flavor. So I think when we are emptied of ourselves, we often find a drop or so left to start with again — a something with the properties of "mother" in vinegar to give tang to the weaker juices of human nature.



## III



My well is one of my proudest possessions. To me it is like nothing in nature so much as a humming-bird's nest. In reality, it is like a deep cup, lined from top to bottom. But its lining is the softest of green, living moss, with ferns tender and fine waving out all along the sides and leaning over to see themselves in the water. Only a wide, irregular strip of trampled turf, a picket-fence falling into decay, and three sunken stone steps separate it from the highway; and day after day travellers see the sign, a tin cup hanging on a stout nail at the spout, and turn in to drink. Many a moonlight night when half asleep have I heard the creak of the well-sweep, ballasted with its three great stones, and the splash of the mossy bucket in the sweet, cold water, and felt a thrill of satisfaction at the thought of the Bible blessing implied. It is the most I have to give, and no one is

ever turned away. It may have kept more than one disgraceful tramp from the tavern at The Corners by forestalling thirst on the way.

Back of my kitchen and the wood-house, a one-story room which turns its face to the west and is blind on the street side, lies my small garden-plot. In my young days there was an outlying farm belonging to us which Squire Vann has owned for a generation. The fence has contracted like the famous walls of the prisoner in Poe's tale; but unlike those it leaves me fair breathing-space, and nobody can take from me the memory of what has been. I can still go out under my grape-vine arbor at the garden-gate to South Pond, across the Squire's pasture, by a footpath as devious and charming as John Burroughs's. Creeping through the worm-fence that makes corner thickets for loveliest spring flowers to hide in, I follow a wavering, damp line along the edge of woodland that stretches for hundreds of acres to the north. It is worth while to come here an hour in advance of the sun, to hear the birds tell each other of their happy fortune in their own freehold. There is a dewy quality about their song then, as if they dipped their bills in the leaf-hollows and moist grasses to clear their throats after sleep.

South Pond hides behind the woodlands which send down many a springy trickle to help the spring freshets. Lily-pads spring up in a little bend that starts to make

acquaintance with the woods, but soon thinks better of it and turns again to the sun. Half a mile away the pond itself loses its holiday look, and goes sputtering and protesting over a rocky ledge of a dam to work the wheels of the big paper-mill below. After that it sallies low-spiritedly through the village, lingers a little back of the new South Church to let bare-legged urchins wade its shallows in summer-time, narrows again with important business ahead, and slips into the harbor a mile off with as much haste as if it had not loitered by the way, insisting noisily like a belated school-boy, that it got here just as quick as ever it could.

A turn in the road hides my nearest neighbor from view, but scarcely from call. He is an old man, bent a little from his mature height by the heavy weight of eighty years. Twenty years ago the church and parsonage made a little centre of interest on Woody Hill, but when the church was burned, by one of those strange accidents that occur sometimes at spring clearings, the society decided to build at South Falls, which had just sprung up like a cluster of mushrooms in the breeding moisture of the new paper-mill.

The younger people wanted a new minister to harmonize with the church. So Mr. Craig came, fresh from the seminary that each year turned loose a score or two of young men with young ideas, and Mr. Timloe stayed on in the old parsonage which the society gave

him to heal his wounded spirit. It was an old house, sadly out of repair; but the old minister and his wife were in the same condition, and all the money that could be begged or borrowed went to make the new parsonage smart.

Mr. Timloe was a quiet, old-school gentleman, whose wig, like his creed, was a little rusty with service, yet sat on him awkwardly as if willing and waiting to be exchanged for something better. His mind lingered in the suburbs of modern thought, dreading the rush and crossed swords in the open of large centres of intelligence. And though he pricked up his ears like a met-tled war-horse at every new battle-cry, he lagged a bit in action, like one stiff in the knees from long service, and constrained to limp a little in the rear of hasty conclusions.

He was a spiritual man, and often absent from the body, to which his practical wife recalled him without ado. He would sit for hours by my fireside, discussing grave problems of this life and the next with such absorption that he often forgot to remove his hat until he reached the door, when he would carry it home like an expectant contribution-box and meekly receive the rebuke that lay in wait for him. The umbrella that his wife put into his hand he would open on a dry day between himself and the cold wintry sun, but use it as a staff in a sudden summer shower; and the Vann boys

insist that they have seen him in a sprinkle holding his cane above his high silk hat. But the Vann boys are untrustworthy as news-venders, because always on the lookout for something funny.

Mrs. Timloe, a large, decided woman, had her mind fully made up on all subjects, which were ticketed and kept in tidy compartments. She had no feminine fear of long rains and spring freshets, because the Bible had said once for all that the world was to be burned up.

She held her small court in a bedroom just off the large sitting-room which was the centre and pivot of the house. For several years she had kept watch and ward from her chimney-corner, never moving from it except at meal times, when black Chloe dragged her, chair and all, to the table, that she might comment on the manners of her household. A little fire smouldered on her hearth, and a pot of some sort of herb-tea was always brewing on the raked-out embers. The room had a compound flavor of liniment, camphor, dead air, hot flannel, and herbs. Here little Timmy Brock came at night to say his verses and his prayers, and to report progress and conduct at school; and here he stood, like a little man, when damp feet were suspected, and took his boneset tea made from herbs he himself had gathered—a refinement of cruelty, like that of sending a boy to cut the birch-stick for his own flogging.

Sometimes he walked out with his grandfather like a

living illustration of the seasons; a sorry little figure in home-made clothes large enough for next year, which he never seemed to grow to. His soul must have shrunk within him at their bagginess, but he was a child, and helpless.

Sometimes as a privilege he was allowed to sit up away past seven o'clock and go with his grandfather to a neighborhood prayer-meeting, the one dissipation of his evenings.

Mr. Craig was busy with the young people's affairs in the South Parish, so this special prayer-meeting was given over to Mr. Timloe, a few elderly men and women, and his former deacons, who had been retired with their pastor, but retained their titles *emeritus*.



## IV



DEACON THADDEUS and Deacon Noadiah are distant cousins with the same family name, which they lost by having too much of it, so that for years they have been sufficiently specified as Deacon Thad and Deacon Diah. Deacon Diah, who has a sheep-farm, would sooner break a small commandment than laugh on the Lord's Day, and has lived for upwards of eighty years with no more sense of humor than one of his own Southdowns; while Deacon Thad, who is the soul of loving-kindness, sees life itself in the light of a joke.

Deacon Diah is a long, leathery, sun-dried man, so well preserved that he seems capable of wearing out the half of another century in addition to his inroads on this. He delighted always in sounding Bible phrases, and rose every week in his appointed place at the prayer-meeting to exult in the terrors of the Lord, the clouds and darkness round about the Throne, and the thunders of Sinai. He was fond of representing the Lord as riding upon the whirlwind, with garments dyed in blood, terrible in righteousness, powerful to save. Sometimes

in a wild, prophetic outburst he would cry: "Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe;" which made unscriptural pictures in the worldly mind. Again, in a warlike spirit, he would shout in a voice that quavered and broke: "Through God we shall do valiantly: for He it is that shall tread down our enemies." Now Moses would have been aggressive by comparison with Deacon Noadiah, who was the meekest of mankind and incapable of making an enemy. "My horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of a unicorn" lost all spiritual meaning, for the Deacon is very deaf and carries a large ear-trumpet, which fact caused me anguish when he hit upon this special quotation, and deep compunction in the reflective home hours when there is no temptation to smile. But it was almost impossible to follow him and at the same time resist the Evil One's temptation to literalness. "My days are like a shadow that declineth, and I am withered like grass. I am tossed up and down like the locust. My knees are weak through fasting, and my flesh faileth of fatness. The ploughers ploughed upon my back: they made long their furrows." But after the breathless suspense, the fear of some strange passage of peculiar application, came always the sublime climax: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? And blessed be His glorious name forever,

and let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and amen."

Deacon Thad, on the contrary, who is the jolliest soul in town, subdued the natural man, and prayed in a tone of deep despondency that we "might be kep' from whatever we ough' to be kep' from;" that we "might be truly thankful that it was as well with us as it was;" that "our unworthy lives as mere worms of the dust was spared to see the close of another day;" ending with a mild petition that "the Lord would bless all those whom we ough' to pray for, and keep us to see the light of another morning." It was a relief to see once more the old twinkle in his eye as he greeted Sister Parson or Brother Wray at the door, and joked in an every-day tone on the "sort of weather we was gettin' to pay for the wet spell." If little Joe chanced to be with him, he rubbed the boy's hair the wrong way as he talked, or thumped him on the head as if he had been a big dog. He was fond of saying that Joe was his rowen crop, real green after all the rest had been gathered in.

Sisters and brothers came home yearly to Thanksgiving with always a new baby among them; but for the rest of the year Joe's was the only young life in the house. His mother had been an invalid since his birth, and latterly shut in a darkened room; but after her death a step-sister came, and Joe saw sunnier days. In

an unconscious moment Deacon Thad introduced the new-comer as his half-wife's sister. She was a kindly creature of no more than forty autumns, who tempered little Joe's sore mourning for his mother with unselfish tenderness, and so wholly won my heart. In time she came to be his second mother, a position I could have accepted with gratitude but for the encumbrance it implied.

Deacon Thaddeus is a good man and true; but the year I bought my Christmas card, I took pains to get back all the memories of my one homesick year at boarding-school. The house itself had disappeared, — I walked a mile to see: but the people it once held all lived again for me. They crowded the train as I came home at night. The faces of the college boys who used to meet our prim procession even in recitation hours, and who would walk home with the teacher at our head for the privilege of opening the gate at the seminary and holding it till the last one had passed in, stand out as plainly as faces carved on cameos, and with the same sharpness of outline. But that is too dead a comparison, and they are alive, every one. They simply *are*. I hear their voices. I see the young light in their eyes. I do not need to remember. I only see and hear. One face I specially recall that makes the thought of Deacon Thad ludicrous. So I smile with a mist before my eyes.

He married and was killed in the war — Joe always

asks *what* war, when I tell him stories about our brave soldiers, and thinks it may have been the war of the Revolution. One day I heard that his boy, whom he never saw, was professor of something or other in the college. It can't be possible that he is old enough! Neither can I fancy him as a freshman even, shouting *Lau-re-gare Ho-rat-e-oos* in a tongue strange to his father. Singular, that one man, and he not a beauty, should make all others look plain forever after. But I was very young then, and all things partook of the nature of miracles. I wish men and women seemed half as supernatural now.

Deacon Thad never lifted his hat to a woman in his life, and I doubt if he ever thought quick enough to open a gate for one. He has probably always gone first through doors and gateways; yet he was far more of a hero when he shut himself away from his family and watched day and night with black Chloe's husband, who died of small-pox, than the man who galloped to his death at Shiloh. But the glamour is lacking, and we are fearfully and wonderfully made as to our minds and hearts.

Sometimes when Joe brings the milk at night I coax him in to stay awhile, and toast his cold fingers and toes at the kitchen fire. He says he doesn't mind a bit, but for all he is so brave I know how half-frozen fingers

feel. One night it was snowing fast, and he looked like a small Santa Claus as he came through the wood-room door with both cats at his heels, Cattery leading, of course. I shook him off and took the broom to him, and then it occurred to me that it would be nice to keep him to tea.

He said it would be jolly to stay all night and shovel me out in the morning, but Pa and Aunt Marty would be scared to death if he didn't come home.

"Tell ye what," he added, "I'll skit home 'cross the pond and tell 'em."

He was generous to all my thoughts.

"Across the pond in the dark, Joe?"

"Ho! I ain't afraid o' dark!" and off he went.

I hung the lighted lantern in the wood-house, but it was like a spark on a cotton string in the whirl of snow. Thoughts of treacherous holes in the ice made me repent that I had asked the child; and for half an hour I knew how nervous mothers feel. But in thirty-five minutes he was back, with both cats tagging again. Pa had come with him to the fence, he said. Then he picked up Kittery — "Kitzy, my darling," he called her — to warm her cold paws in his colder ones, before his overcoat was off. Kit accepted invitations, but never presumed; and we three sat down before the fire after the wet things were shaken and hung up by the bellows to dry.



Aunt Marty had rolled up warm woollen stockings and felt slippers with the flannel night-gown, just as a mother would, so it was now a delight to hear the snow dash against the windows. "Knock away, you can't get in," said Joe with a sense of shelter and comfort. The wind rose, and we could hear wild whirls of snow and a rushing sound in the trees.

"What shall we have for tea, Joe?" I asked, when the chill was taken off him.

"What ye got?" he asked.

There was no round-aboutness with the boy, nor any uncomfortable self-consciousness.

"Would milk toast do?"

"Baby mess," he said frankly, but added generously, "You can have it if you want to."

"I don't, Joe."

"I'm hungrier 'n two cubs," he said; "les' have somethin' fillin'."

"Cold chicken pie and potatoes roasted in the ashes?"

"That's good — far's they go," Joe said, looking thoughtfully into the fire.

"Hot buckwheat cakes and maple syrup?"

"Jolly! What next?"

"Crullers and raspberry jelly, and a little piece of mince-pie to make us dream?"

"I guess so," said Joe, with his mouth watering.

"And after supper I wonder if you couldn't crack some walnuts for — what do you guess?"

"Dunno."

"Ever make candy at your house?"

Joe shook his head. "Don't know how."

"But I do."

So while I washed the supper dishes, after Joe had eaten all that is possible for a boy, he cracked the nuts, and we picked out the meats together, and then made molasses candy in a spider over the kitchen coals. We both watched it, but Cattery was distracting; and with all our cold iron spoons at hand, it would rise now and then like lava from an active volcano, and pop its bubbles at us in an alarming way.

At last it was done, poured foaming into an earthen bowl, covered, and set out in the snow to cool. Cattery had to be banished to the woodshed to keep her prying paws from being scorched. Joe was sure she couldn't push the cover off, but experience had taught me wisdom. She was a cat of infinite resources. At last the bowl sank to its edge in the snow, and I braved the whirling storm again to bring it in. There was a great clatter of unlatched doors, for the storm was at its height. I made a tempting basin of warm soapsuds, under the impression that boys, like cats, avoid water by instinct; and Joe was caught in the snare and scrubbed manfully, leaving only a little dark scallop

around his thumbs, which didn't matter. I expected him to eat most of the candy. Then we buttered our hands well, and took up the mass which was still hot in the middle after the nuts had been stirred in. Just as we had it well stretched, and were folding it for a second pull, with the light making silvery streaks on it, Joe cried, —

“There's that cat in again, with her head in the bowl!”

“Never mind,” I said; “she can't eat it, and it isn't hot enough to burn her nose.”

“But now she's licking the butter,” said Joe, who faced the table.

She had caught us both in a trap. I backed up and reached the table, pulling Joe after me, and elbowed the creature off. She pushed as hard as if she had been a good-sized boy, and was back again, ready for another spring, before I could tip over the chair she stood on. But Joe had a practised foot, being a boy, though a small one, and she recognized a masculine element unusual to the house, and skulked behind the wood-basket.

“Come on,” shouted Joe; “it's empty, and I'll catch her in it!”

So, hampered as we were by the sticky stuff pulling at the ends of our fingers, we made a sortie and Joe actually kicked the bushel basket over her. For the first time in my experience Cattery was entrapped.

Her yellow tail waved angry defiance under the rim of the basket, which did not lie close to the floor on account of its handles, and her searching paws appeared on all sides, to Joe's great glee. Not until the candy was drawn and cut off in fancy twists did he release her. But as usual her anger did not burn. She forgave us at once, and jumped for my lap as soon as I sat down, and there was no peace until the wood-room door was firmly latched between us and her.

## V



WE took our candy into the sitting-room, and drew up our chairs before the fire which curled over the white birch logs, while the storm whistled and roared, and the snow fell down the chimney and hissed as it turned into steam. Joe spoke up suddenly.

"What's the matter o' that Timloe feller? Don't he never come here?"

"Oh, yes," I said; "he comes and reads his Latin to me. He studies with Mr. Craig, you know."

"Yes, I know," Joe said, and added after a moment, "I wish I knew about Latin."

"I'll teach you," I said.

"You!" Joe's eyes were round, and so was his mouth. "I didn't know's old maids could talk Latin."

"It's true, Joe, that I don't say *Kizer* and *Kickero* like Timmy; but I know the old-fashioned kind, and if you want to learn we'll get him to come in and tell us the new fashion."

"Bully for you!" said Joe encouragingly. "But I didn't s'pose"—

"Now, Joey, don't call me an old maid again. I

used to be as young as anybody — as young as you are."

"Really?" asked Joe with interest and a frank disregard of my possible feelings. And then his mind wandered to the "Timloe feller" again, and I had to explain that his name was really Timloe Brock, and that his mother had been a little girl when I was, and my very best friend. I said that all the other children had died years ago, that Timmy did not remember his mother, and that he came to live with his grandfather when Mr. Brock married again.

"But what ails him?" Joe urged. "He don't never have any fun like other fellers. We all love to get a clip at 'im with a snowball, to see 'im dodge. Why don't he go to school? No fun in bein' head all the time. Fun's in spellin' down a whole row."

How could I tell the child that poor Timmy's life was nothing but a little pinched page of minus signs: that he had to pay pitiless tithes of mint, anise, and cummin all his melancholy days; that it was always, "Come in or you'll get hit;" "Don't go near the water and then you won't get drowned;" "Boys that skate almost always get in, and we don't want a funeral here;" "Don't ever try to pull anybody out, you'd get in yourself;" "Keep clear away;" "Don't say a word when boys shout at you;" "Don't climb trees and tear your clothes." Yet with all this hen-care, I doubt if he



ever got any real wing-brooding. The good old grandfather used to stroke his hair and teach him Bible verses, but never got so far as "He that saveth his life shall lose it."

Joe was looking straight through the fire into some dreamland beyond. I had been as far away. Then we both came back to our candy, and I said, —

"Joe, I wouldn't snowball him if I were you; he's a lonesome little fellow. What if you had to catch a live mosquito in summer-time, and take it up to your room for company — to sing to you nights?"

"He didn't do that!" Joe said with incredulity.

"He told me he did, and I believe him. Maybe you'll be in college together, in the same class; who knows? and I shall want you to be good friends so that I can be proud when you both graduate. For I couldn't go twice at my age. I shall be an old woman then."

"Jiminy!" said Joe. "College!" and then he whistled.

No doubt Paradise seemed as far off to him, and as unattainable in his mortal state. Now I was very anxious to have Joe go to college. It would mean more to me than he could ever know. If that baby should be left at my door it would go to college. I said nothing more. Sometimes I have noticed if you put a seed into good ground and let it alone, it gets a

start before you know it; but if you potter around it, it gets discouraged and dies without coming to anything.

When it was bedtime, I sent Joe up into the north garret for the warming-pan, and while he was undressing by the fire I had it filled with coals, and the chill taken off his bed.

"Oh, how hot it does feel!" he sighed contentedly, cuddling down and looking around the room. "Whose room is this?"

"My little boy's."

"You haven't got any little boy."

"You're mine to-night."

"Oh-h! I thought you was jokin'. Whose rockin'-chair's that?"

"Mine, when I was a little girl. That will be my boy's too."

"That desk too?"

"Yes."

"I know you've got rag babies somewheres."

"Yes; want one to sleep with you?"

"Gracious, no! I'm too big. Last year I was littler," he said after some truthful thinking. "When I've said my prayers, don't you wan' to stay an' talk with me? I'll cover you all up jest as I do Aunt Marty, so's you won't be cold."

I said I would stay, though we had most of our talk out down-stairs.

"Now I'll say 'em," he said, and moved to get up.

"Can't you kneel in my lap? It's so cold," I added doubtfully, for I didn't know anything about boys.

"Yes, I s'pose so;" and two strong little arms went around my neck.

This was Joe's prayer, the first sentence in a whisper:

"God bless my dear up in heaven, and Pa, and Aunt Marty, and all the folks in this house, and—everything, and please make it snow all night and all to-morrow, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

"What did you mean by 'everything'?" I asked.

"I meant Kitzy, an' the old cat too, 'cause she needs it, and 'cause she's Kitzy's mother; but I didn't know 'twas right to say it. I guess God'll understand, don't you?"

"Yes," I said; "He always understands."

"Do you s'pose it'll snow to-morrow? If I owned the sky, I'd send down snow every day."

"Why do you want it to snow all to-morrow? We should be shut up here like mice in a trap."

"I know it; but 'twould be such fun to stay here all day."

"So it would, Joe, for me; but how about school?"

"Oh, teacher wouldn't mind. She's got a lot of big boys, and they'd shovel paths."

"But how should I get to my well?"

Joe winked and thought. He had long eyelashes, and they twinkled fast with his thinking.

"Tell y' what, we'll shovel, both of us if it's real deep. You don't mind do you? I'll push the shovel in, an' you can lift it up. Goin' now?"

"Yes; it's my bedtime too."

"Ain't you goin' to kneel down 'side the bed? Aunt Marty does."

There was no denying Joe.

"Why didn't you say it out loud? Didn't you want anything?"

"Next time," I said with guilty evasion, and gave a final tuck to the blankets.

"Why, you forgot to kiss me!" he said, rising on one elbow in surprise. "You haven't got a bit good remembery, have you?"

It was a bitter cold morning, and snow fell at intervals. Before I had started my kitchen fire Joe called, so I touched a match to the pine kindlings and hurried up-stairs, fearing he might be ill. But before I reached the top he shouted again, "Oh, quick, quick! hurry up an' see all these fat alligators!"

A shivering little barefoot figure stood by the window, and just outside the great Norway spruce held loads of damp snow, each branch with a broad white back and funny green feet crawling back and forth in the breeze.

"Scamper to bed," I said, "and you shall have a little fire of your own to dress by."

So Joe scampered with his teeth chattering, and I lighted the wood that is always laid in Doorstep-Philip's small fireplace, and brought up a pitcher of hot water, as if Joe had truly been Philip, my King, and I his handmaiden to command.

The storm was a memorable one, and we were snow-bound. Joe had a glorious time in the garret, setting traps, rummaging barrels and boxes, rocking Kittery in the wooden cradle where I spent so many seasick hours in helpless infancy; whirring the spinning-wheel, buzzing the reel, rolling cheese hoops down-stairs, till Cattery of her own accord took refuge in the wood-house. He came down to dinner, grimy and happy, with his hair on end.

"I've brushed and brushed," he said, "and smoothed it with my hands, but I can't make head nor tail of it. The more I brush the more it won't lie down. Aunt Marty says it's all full of something like — like lightning."

After dinner we had quiet little games, Nine-Men-Morris, and Fox-and-Geese, played with corn kernels on the bootjack, where my father made a diagram for the chase when I was a child.

About three o'clock the snow stopped falling, and Deacon Thaddeus, with a face as beamy as the rising

sun's own in my kitchen almanac, came over in top-boots to shovel me out and take my boy home. As the little fellow sat astride his father's broad shoulders when my paths were dug, I looked after him with regret, and spoke unadvisedly with my lips concerning the joy it would be to keep him always.

"And so you might," said the Deacon cheerfully, "so you might; but there's conditions, you know. Mebby you never heard o' the woman that asked the best-lookin' one o' the Siamese twins to stay to dinner one time."

I said the story was new to me.

"Oh, 'tain't much of a story," said the Deacon with a twinkle; "but she had to put on two extry plates."

Yet even then I suspect the half-wife's sister had been spoken to, for they were married when the daffodils came out in the spring. I sent them a great pitcherful.

Joe will never be my boy. Perhaps there is still a doorstep baby in reserve for me. But how could I, who know so little how to order my own life, think of directing that of any human being? Poor thing! I thought of what Joe called me, when I said I never had a little boy. "But p'raps you will up in heaven — poor thing!" Mother-nurture may grow, like mother-love. But I cannot reason about it. If it is to be, I shall find a way. It might not be a bad plan to watch

the development of a little life as I watch the growth of my plants. If they have plenty of sunshine and pure air, they do well. And any one who watches them can't help keeping bugs and beasts at a distance. Even a few weeds may grow up along with them without harm. I think sometimes they shade them from too hot sunshine and keep them from wilting.

Perhaps mothers bend, and straighten, and snip off too much, and pull up weeds so fast and so jerkily that the roots are disturbed and discouraged. There may be a parable from nature here, that even an old maid can comprehend. I should try to be a far-sighted mother, and look away over and beyond some things that I couldn't help nor hinder, to the greater things that go to make a man. Near-sighted views may be correct in detail, but are apt to be pinched.

My Philip shall be good because he loves goodness, not because he hates evil. His life shall be filled so full that there shall be no room for badness. When a tramp at my well overflows the cup with pure spring water, there is no room on top for whiskey. There are plenty of people who use evil as a scarecrow, and always keep it in sight for moral purposes. They believe in the lash at the start, not the laurel at the goal. I want my boy to believe wholly in heaven, and waste very little time thinking about hell.

When my Knight Philip starts for the Holy Grail, he

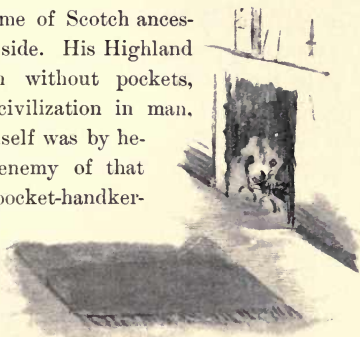


shall not be dropped into a sewer first, to find out about the world. It shall be high and deep to him, if not broad. A joke and a world may be too broad. Longitude is every bit as true as latitude, and the path of the heavenly bodies worth as much study as the lives of the demi-monde in fitting a soul for its place in this world even.

## VI

SQUIRE VANN came of Scotch ancestry on the mother's side. His Highland forbears were born without pockets, those inducers of civilization in man, and the Squire himself was by heredity the sworn enemy of that social amenity, the pocket-handkerchief. Neither handkerchiefs nor tooth-brushes were classed as staple articles on his shop-

ping-list, and the boys emulated his example with a zeal which did not extend to his moral qualities. These were perhaps more showy than abundant, but what they lacked in number was made up in strength. To be sure they had been kept in abeyance in youth, but none the less he expected his children to put in practice his theories at an early age, and was both surprised and furious when they failed to do so. The pranks he had joyfully played in his youth were still as sweet morsels to his tongue; but when the boys



unwisely attempted to repeat his successes, he took them one by one to the barn, while their soft-hearted mother wept behind the window-curtain.

Square Vann, as his compeers called him, prided himself upon his freedom of speech; but his wife looked as if a modest slavery in that respect would be more acceptable at home, especially in the presence of others. If he thought his boys in the wrong, he kicked them frankly before any one — parson, deacon, or lay-member — with the promptness of Sparrowgrass's man who pulled trigger first and made inquiries afterwards. If the boys could prove that they were innocent of offence, the Squire would say cheerfully, "Credit you one then. Remind me of it next time." But there was scant time for reminders when the Squire's wrath was hot. His foot was heavy and his memory short, so it was long credit and no balance ever struck.

The house, large and pretending, somewhat overbearing in fact, like its owner, was fine with velvet carpets and glowing upholstery the cost of which the whole town knew to a penny. It was a doubtful pleasure to be asked to take tea with Mrs. Square Vann, as the neighbors respectfully called her, for something always went wrong. The Head was never ready to take his place, but would look inside the door when the visitors were seated to suggest that we go ahead with the gim-cracks while he helped himself to cold pot-luck in the

buttery. If he came in coatless, slamming doors and still ruminating, in the middle of the meal, it was only to fill everybody with unrest and his wife with apprehension. If ever a woman's chair was cushioned with thorns, she was that woman. If it was summer-time, his grievance might be that the cat had been in the cream, and probably tasted of everything else — a fact or even fiction that was malappetizing to guest and hostess. If in winter, somebody had left some door open and frozen something; and poor Mrs. Vann colored, and looked miserable when he asked gruffly, "Where's them boys?"

A spinster has the advantage over a Squire's wife even, at times.

Adam Vann's manners were original, and drawn from his every-day habit of mind. If one sinner destroyeth much good, it is equally true that one perverse good man can sow the seeds of generations of unpleasantness, whose name in capitals is Disgust. If I had boys that said "Father does," when I reprov'd them for boorishness, I am sure I should reply, with small regard for immediate consequences, that that was because his mother didn't kill him when he was little. One must have mercy on future wives, as well as loyalty to present husbands and past mothers.

The Squire had a tolerably kind heart when there was special occasion to call its faculties into use; but

his sympathies were not broad nor his griefs deep. When he caught the boys quarrelling, which is a mild word for their fracas, he whipped them both, soundly and impartially, and forbade them to go whining to their mother, who loved them at such times not wisely, but too well.

One day in the early spring, he sent the youngest to school when the child was shaking with the chill that precedes scarlet-fever, and blamed his mother openly for coddling him; but he sat up with him night after night until the danger was over, when he realized his mistake. The neighbors tired in time of the oft-told tale of his sleepless nights. It never occurred to him to worry over the fact that my Joe nearly died of the same fever, or that the school was broken up for weeks because Mrs. Vann was not allowed to use her own judgment.

He never failed to go to church twice on Sundays, nor to pay liberally for the preaching, which he said cost more than it come to; but he wondered not a little why his boys didn't seem to enjoy an article that was so expensive. Sunday illnesses received no quarter from him; and after the victim of a sudden toothache at bell-ringing time had enjoyed home privileges for the morning, it was no fun to be put to bed and fed on water gruel while the family feasted on fat things.

In an unwise moment I had once suggested the worth of education to boys; but the Squire impressed

upon me the fact that he didn't want no algebray nor Latin talk 'round his place to scare the cattle. United States speech was what he made his money by, and what was good enough for him they'd have to put up with.

It was of no use, and very likely the boys were not worth it; but I did venture to say that I had often heard him calling his cows in Latin, and thought the boys had the same habit. He looked at me blankly, but I knew he was not capable of humiliating himself so far as to seek an explanation from a woman. Indeed, it seemed to give me a certain laughable title to regard from him. Here was a woman who had dared answer him back.

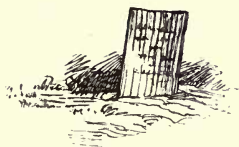
Often as I sit musing before my fire, I arrange the room to suit my Philip, whose tastes will be new-fashioned. I fancy a real Turkish rug in place of my home-braided one, and silken pillows on the wide old lounge. There must be pretty draperies at the windows too, and perhaps a *portière* before my bedroom door. My books I must add to, for though I get many new ones from the village library, one must have a good stock of old friends on hand. My boy shall not be ashamed when he brings home his college friends. No doubt I need a good deal of brushing up myself. To one who has never been twenty-five miles

from home, the world seems as curious and unreliable as when it was flat, and stood on the backs of tortoises; and kings and queens as unhuman as griffins. One needs to travel a little in order to get into just relations with things: to be able, for instance, to think of royalty as sometimes caught on Monday mornings with its crown off and its sceptre behind the door, and therefore subject to the accidents and mortifications of our common humanity.

Therefore my boy shall travel. He shall go and come as he pleases to and from his home. If love for me doesn't draw him, he shall stay away. He must have a bank account, and I shall not ask to see his book. But he will tell me because I love him, and because I would go cold and hungry to give his young life a chance. I shall surely trust him, and if he prove unworthy, why, so much the worse for me.

But what if he were really to prove a prodigal, and fond of husks? I wonder if I couldn't win him back in time with turkey and plum pudding and love. It was grand Robert Collyer who loved to say, "The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven."

## VII



ONE morning in the spring, soon after Joe ceased to be motherless, I was down on my knees among my tulips, which grow in a bed that reaches from the wood-house nearly to the well, when Squire Vann's hard "Hello!" brought me to my feet. He stood in the roadway, dangling a yellow cat by the tail. But it was not Kittery.

"Ketched for sure in my rat-trap," he called hilariously across the fence. "Guess she used to be your yaller cat before she left for parts unknown," he added wittily; "an' if you're agreeable, I'll jest heave her over the stun wall. Help make grass grow."

I nodded, for there is never any temptation to continue conversation with Squire Vann, especially at such a distance; and when Joe came in the afternoon — for it was Saturday and a half-holiday, I gave him a dime to find Cattery and give her decent burial in the garden. He rolled the poor defeated thing carefully in a newspaper, and dug a grave as deep as he could with my trowel. It was his plan to station Kittery at his side as



chief mourner, with a black ribbon around her neck ; but the programme failed at the critical moment, as Kit caught sight of a squirrel, and we saw her no more for an hour.

After the grave was covered and a few flowers laid on it — Joe chose yellow tulips — the child sat down on the doorstep with his chin in his hand. I thought at first he was chief mourner. But it was only that “genius burned” just then, and he was devising an epitaph.

“She wasn’t much of a cat,” he said thoughtfully, “but she was a mother. First thing I thought I’d get you to help me print it on a board, and we could call it a tombstone. ’Twouldn’t be — but then” —

“What were you going to print, Joe?”

Joe, still intent on the future, lined out slowly : —

“Here lies  
That cat,  
Killed by  
A rat  
Trap.

“But I don’t b’lieve I’ll do it,” he added. “Seems jest ’s if Kitzy’d know it, and feel bad.”

Life seemed less intricate with Cattery under ground and no good qualities left behind her in memory. And yet I sometimes found myself wondering if I hadn’t been too ready with the broom — the only argument

she ever understood. Memory and regret are twin sisters.

It began to rain about eight o'clock, so I laid two sticks together and drew my stand of books before the companionable blaze. In a previous state of existence I must have been a fire-worshipper.

There are times when Victor Hugo and Dickens torment me with their tales of horror. This was one of the times ; and I rose and turned their backs to the wall. But once set apart in this way, I could not for a moment forget them, and the firelight flashed twice as often on them as usual, so that I had to cross the room again and turn them back. After that it was hard to keep my mind off them. So I thought it a good time for a little visit with cheery Howells, who brings a fresh breath of air along with him. I laid him above Emerson and Lowell, and mused awhile over the open book. A fire tempts one to "busy idleness." Sometimes as I sit looking into the heart of it, with rain or sleet insisting at the windows, George William Curtis slips into the easy-chair opposite my low rocker, infinitely wiser and handsomer than the young Apollo of the Potiphar Papers, and lends dignity and graciousness to the chimney corner. And presently the Farmer of Edgewood saunters in with a tolerant smile on his patrician face, and Whittier rests his head on one long, thin hand, and watches the birchwood flame silently.

My blue-eyed Philip leans his golden head against my sombre knee, until Tolstoï shambles in with Walt Whitman, when I send him out to play with the kitten. The unkempt Russian does not see me, and I shrink away from the fire as he draws nearer, his eyes like dead craters where awful and unlawful fires have burnt themselves out. Whitman looks over the group, pulls on his hat hard, and shuts the door decidedly, as he goes.

It opens again, and Dr. Holmes comes in. His face is sunny with the eternal youth of his soul; but shall we ever again see "the light that in his eye he bore" when he thought out his immortal Ode to Bryant?

I doubt if he would recognize Tolstoï's homœopathic cure for life's ills — fighting vice with vice. The Russian says, in the telling words of a wise critic, "I am your brother, therefore I will go down into the mire with you. Christ says, 'I am your brother, therefore come up higher with me.' " Tolstoï fades away like a burnt cinder; and as he passes from sight I remember one little scene in "*Anna Karénina*," the only thing I wish to remember — the one sacred thing in the book to me, when the mother, after months of desertion, comes back before daybreak to look once more at her boy, and sees how long his little legs look below his nightgown, as he springs up half asleep to hug and kiss her and sob out his happiness. This alone moves me.

The close, heavy air grows fresh again as Howells appears — Howells, whose scalpel cuts clean down to the conscience, even if he “keep his feet” but indifferently “among his shalls and wills.” It is a pity, though, that he should have known so many rudimentary women. One doesn’t mould a heroine from putty, nor change a butterfly into an eagle by any process of reasoning.

The women of the western hemisphere owe much to the Norman-Saxon strain of blood that runs deep, but puts duty before pleasure, others before self. That which comes of Puritan blood is not a colorless life.

The scene changes, and my dreaming takes on another phase. My thoughts go straying down the spring footpaths of the past, in the young days when Rachel Timloe was my best and only friend. The apple-tree where we climbed to study our lessons among the leaves, the willow where we swung on happy Saturdays, waved and drooped in memory till I could hear the wind in their leaves, and the sound of Rachel’s high-keyed voice as she dared me to swing higher. And within call of this very house was her child, the only one left of six. With her dying breath she had given this puny babe, who could not remember his mother’s face, to the care of two old people who knew no more about the nurture of a child than if he had been a new Triptolemus.

He was not an engaging boy, but I pitied him with all my heart. Only two weeks before he had played truant and fallen into the river in a vain attempt to catch a fish and enjoy himself after the manner of secular boys. Of course Deacon Thad, everybody's guardian angel, was crossing the bridge to his up-meadow at the time — always Deacon Thad! — and he plunged in, boots, coat, and all, for the little fellow had gone down for the last time. He carried him to his own house in his arms, and then sent for me. "Aunt Marty," in lilac muslin with soft lace at the throat and wrists, was calm and ready as usual, and had hot blankets to wrap him in, and a roaring fire on the hearth. The sunshine lay in a yellow square on the floor, whose clear whiteness was tracked with wet boots and puddly with dripping garments. In a very little while we brought him to, rubbed him red, and dressed him in Joe's clothes, while I took upon myself the task of telling the family that he wasn't well, and that I should like to take care of him that night.

He begged that I wouldn't tell what had happened, and I promised willingly enough. My conscience was clear, for it was not I who had tempted him to disobedience, and as both Mr. and Mrs. Timloe were ailing, with symptoms of influenza, I had no difficulty in keeping him.

That night a fever set in, and he was holding

imaginary conversations with his grandmother at intervals all through the night.

"Am I sorry? No'm, not one bit." "Ever do it again? You bet I will!" "No, it doesn't make you feel bad. Not half so bad as you always make me feel." "A pretty sort of a boy I am! And you did it." The old Adam within me was gratified; for I was not responsible for the child's conscience.

Here was a gentle soul unconsciously at bay; and we poor human creatures don't know what to do with such. So I "abandoned him to Providence," and dried his wet clothes. It would be an easy matter to make headstrong little Joe see the right and wrong in such a case; but he had been developed by love, and so law had a controlling power over him. Even physical vision comes from crossed lines.

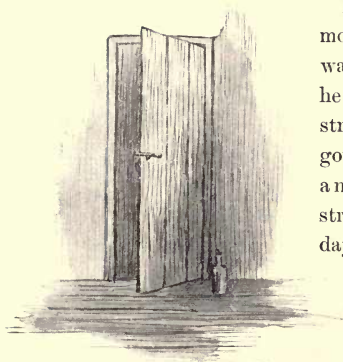
And yet we speak of a "boy" as if we had fully accounted for the species.

Timmy was better in the morning, and as it was Saturday he played about the garden and woods, and probably went to the river. I shall never inquire. Mr. Timloe grew worse, and the child stayed on, so the fact of his truancy did not appear.

He was an elfish little fellow. After school he would curl up on the lounge and read his heart out. Walter Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, fairly melted away before the light of his eyes. When supper was ready he came

as from a far country, — like Eve from Paradise, his soul still with his books, and not a word could I get from him. I used to wonder whether he thought me capable of betraying him, or whether he simply never looked off his books long enough to think of me at all.

## VIII



I HAD felt for some months that Squire Vann was a little "near" when he bargained for my last strip of salable land and got it at his own valuation, and the impression was strengthened when, three days before Thanksgiving, he sent me a fine, large, green goose. But it is unneighborly to look even a gift goose in the

mouth, so I accepted it with proper thanks and invited dinner company.

For years before I had been quite alone. There was a time when the minister said grace at my board after the church service on Thanksgiving Day; but for many years Mrs. Timloe has been an unwilling guest in her own house, and her husband could not leave her alone on the special New England at-home day of all the year.



Other people gathered children of the second and third generations to help them eat, drink, and be merry; and though invitations to go abroad in the neighborhood were not lacking, I knew the good housewives would not be offended if I declined with thanks to "make a crowd" at the family circle. Some go out into the highways and hedges, and compel people. But there are no poor in our town. So instead of spending on luxuries, I am adding to my bank account. Sometimes I am afraid that I too am growing "a little near" in my zeal to lay up for Philip the loiterer.

But after my green goose came, it suddenly occurred to me that Deacon Noadiah and his elderly daughter Mercy Jane had no one to come home this year. Death had been looking in at doors and windows here and there, where their earthly treasures were, until this year his hands were empty. It was a real joy to prepare for the feast and to know how it would be appreciated by people who took more thought for the morrow than for the present day. Mince, pumpkin, and tart pies, cranberry sauce, and Indian pudding kept me busy and merry; and when my goose was beginning to brown beside the chicken-pie, I put on my bonnet, locked my door, and started for the "meetin' 'us," as the old folk styled Mr. Craig's modern church, which was quite a proud edifice for South Falls.

As a loyal descendant of the Pilgrims, it was a duty

to listen to the long sermon and join in the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, while the dinner, left to its own watch and ward, did as well as most trusted things do. A modern housekeeper knows none of the joys of an old-fashioned brick oven well heated, which holds enough to last a good-sized family for a week, and attends to its own business in a leisurely, assured way that could not be hindered nor hurried if all the political systems of the universe should collapse. Trust a boy and a brick oven, and you have my word that the result will be satisfactory.

My mind was at rest about my dinner, and the table was set. I had decided to ask the Deacon to say grace, but to do my own carving, as the choice between white and dark meat would not be clear without the intervention of the trumpet, which would seriously interfere with the carvers and various required tools. The fire was laid, and the mug of cider drawn and set away by the cool pantry-window. So we jogged slowly home from meetin', Mercy Jane taking her father's arm, and nodding vigorously as he commented on several p'intns in the sermon which he thought quite good for a man of Parson Craig's tender years.

But as we drew near the house which stood full in the clear, cold sunshine, something strange caught my eye and set my pulses hammering so that I walked like one in a treadmill. There was a something on the

doorstep, and it had the form of a basket. A basket with the cover tied down. Mercy Jane looked up suddenly and saw it too. She had just dropped her father's arm to open the gate for him. I was inhospitably behind them, urging my feet to do their duty.

"I guess Tamar's girls fetched home your washin' before meetin'," Mercy Jane said. "They was late, I noticed."

How I blessed Tamar's girls; for my conscience was in a flutter as well as my pulses, and needed time. Why, oh why, did I invite company on this day of days — my own supreme Thanksgiving Day! For it was unmistakably a basket; a basket with its cover tied down. This was no delusion, no false alarm of some materializing Cattery.

I pulled out my key at the top of my stone steps, and turned my pocket wrong side out. Mercy Jane, who had waited for me, picked up my handkerchief which had followed my purse.

"My!" she said, "you're losing all your things."

She waited for me to open the door. What if she should pick up the basket in a neighborly zeal to be of use? My heart was moved out of its place. How should I account for that basket? It was none of mine, and they would discover the fact. Country people have sharp eyes. Besides, my washing always came home on Tuesday, and Mercy Jane would remember it.

In dearth of general news, small facts are made to do service in the small talk of families, even through the medium of a trumpet.

I opened the door in haste, rattling the key in the lock.

"What a Thanksgivingey smell!" said Mercy Jane appreciatively.

"Got something good, I guess," said the Deacon, under the impression that he had opened the conversation. He spoke more wisely than he knew. Yes, the one, real prayed-for good of my life. Oh, for one moment of aloneness!

I set the basket behind the door, listening fearfully, and made haste to establish the Deacon by the fire which I kindled tremblingly, and to take Mercy Jane to the bedroom beyond, where she could lay off her things. I even remembered to set the mug of cider to warm on the hearth for the Deacon's satisfaction. I went down the steps into the kitchen and opened the oven-door for purposes of deception, and let out a delightful odor of green goose. Then I picked up my basket with both hands, and, glancing timidly behind me, took it into the wood-house and latched the door. I went down on my knees beside it and tried to say a prayer, but my chattering teeth confused me, and my dry lips were dumb. My heart was going like a windmill, round and round.

What if it should stop! Would they dare put my

baby — *my* baby — on the town? I knew that Mercy Jane had her things nicely folded by this time and laid on the bed, her gloves in her bonnet and her front hair put up, and that the Deacon would be drumming on the chair-arms and wondering what the posset kept me so long. How could I explain, and at the same time prove my sanity? How could I walk in sensibly, and shout into the Deacon's trumpet, "*I've got a baby!*" It was a trumpet that often gave an uncertain sound, and the Deacon, with his mind on mutton, was liable to answer, "You do, do ye? Fore quarter or rack?"

Heaven knows I had all the rack I could stand. It was supreme torture. Why wouldn't those people go home? How dare they stay? I went back to the kitchen and took off my bonnet and cloak, which I had kept on unconsciously. Mercy Jane was still in the bedroom, taking a last look at herself in my divided glass. Her eyes came above the line of moulding, for she was taller than I, and it gave a sinister expression to her face.

"Land!" she exclaimed, "you haven't got your things off yet. I thought I heard you at the oven."

"Yes," I said guiltily, "I just looked in to see how things were doing. If you'll excuse me, I'll run out now and get the dinner on the table."

"Oh let me help!" she said cordially. "Do. I brought my apron a-purpose."

“ But I refused with the best grace I had at command, on the wicked plea that she might get something on her dress, and begged that she would entertain her father instead. It was impossible to keep this up. I should go mad. All the hard discipline of my life came near going for nothing in those strained moments. A thought of cats flashed over me, though I had carefully shut the two doors. I went softly to the wood-house, making no jar to attract the notice of my silent guests. Yes, a strange cat was at the basket. Her claws were on the reeds, her nose at the cover. It might have been Cattery's ghost. For the first time in my life I was in full sympathy with Cain, the murderer. Doubtless Abel was always hanging around in a maddening way, meekly prying into everything, forestalling him in all his plans. The cat went out through the window, leaving a clatter of broken glass. Besides this, there was not a sound. Was the child asleep? Was it drugged? Was it dead? It was of no use. I must have witnesses. It would be a queer story to come out afterwards, and to be discussed at the corner store and in everybody's kitchen, that I pretended my washing had come home on Thanksgiving—of all days in the year! and it was a *baby*! No, it would be much easier to carry the basket in and open it before the eyes of my guests, in the innocence of my heart, than to walk in with a baby in my arms, dead or alive, and try to explain that I had found it!

My song, like Leigh Hunt's, should be a song of degrees.

So once more I picked up the basket and carried it to the sitting-room fire, which was burning itself out. I had forgotten to bring in more wood. The Deacon and his daughter stared.

"I don't know what it is," I said humbly, hating myself for deceiving as it were, the very elect; "but we'll soon find out."

Mercy Jane was "farse" to help, and went down on her knees the other side of the basket, while her father wiped his dim eyes in order to get a fair sight at whatever lay concealed beneath the cover.

"Don't cut the string; it's a good one," he said.

So Mercy Jane slowly untied it, for her fingers were stiff and clumsy, and the blood was not racing through her veins and hurrying up her faculties. We lifted the lid together. A fair napkin lay under, and on its exact centre a gilt-edged card with rounded corners. On the card was written in a small hand: "Wishing you a Happy Thanksgiving. From Mrs. Esther Vann."

Mercy Jane calmly folded the napkin in its ironed prints, and disclosed oranges, bananas, and white grapes, with a long bottle of home-made wine.

A sense of cruel defeat and a feeling of rising anger at being so desperately cheated stiffened my knees and hardened my heart, so that I rose steadily, and asked

the Deacon in pantomime if he would try the wine. He shook his head dolefully, and said he had to resist temptation — that he even let the wine pass him at Communion seasons. But he smiled a wide, toothless smile as I piled the fruit high on a Lafayette plate, and said contentedly that the earth was full of the goodness of the Lord, who giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry; and who openeth His hand and satisfyeth the desire of every living thing.

I put the basket back in the wood-room, and set the wicked bottle behind my pantry door. But there were tears in my heart.



## IX

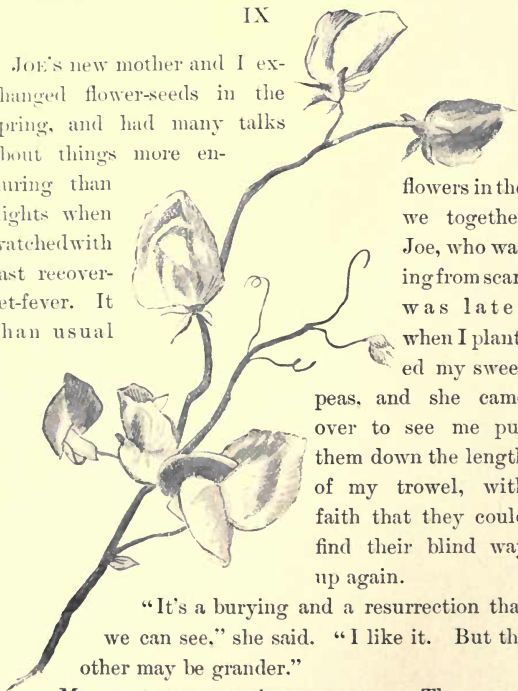
JOE's new mother and I exchanged flower-seeds in the spring, and had many talks about things more enduring than nights when watched with fast recoverlet-fever. It than usual

flowers in the we together Joe, who was ing from scar- was later when I planted my sweet

peas, and she came over to see me put them down the length of my trowel, with faith that they could find their blind way up again.

"It's a burying and a resurrection that we can see," she said. "I like it. But the other may be grander."

My sweet peas run riot every year. They cover the old picket fence ; they attack the cherry-trees ; they



hang from prickly raspberry vines ; they catch at weeds and dead twigs. Everything within reach they glorify. Give me my sweet-pea Paradise, and Mrs. Vann is welcome to her "dahlia Heaven." Aunt Marty said flowers needed a kind of worship to make them do their best, and that she could coax more blossoms from a stubborn geranium than most people. But she loved the sweet things with souls better: mignonette, heliotrope, violets. "They are like love," she added ; and then I understood better why she had married.

One day when we were quite alone and well on in our confidential talks, she said, —

"Many a man I've seen in my lifetime that I could get a good dinner for and sit down at table with ; but never one before that I could stand day after day. You know, they're apt to be tiresome — the best of them. I know all his queernesses," she added ; "but when a woman's 'getting along,' as Mrs. Vann says, such things don't signify as they do to a young girl. Other things go deeper. And if he'd been taught," she continued in a lower tone, "he wouldn't be lacking in any of the little things we women like. I even think he'll learn sometime to open the gate for me."

She laughed softly in the deeps of her gingham sun-bonnet, and I put out my hand, but she was in obscurity and didn't see it.

"Just you let well enough alone !" I said. "What

would you have? He is *sui generis*, and if you try to work him over into Lord Chesterfield, you might as well have married John Smith and done with it."

"Bless you!" she cried, dropping the trowel to grip my hand. "I knew well enough you'd had your laugh over him years ago."

I had misjudged her when I thought there might be little sensitive places in her heart. After that we talked him over like two mothers; and the more we laughed and pulled him to pieces, the more we found to love and admire, till we both wiped our eyes like two confidential school-girls in the giggle age, and went on to compare notes about Joe. It seemed a good time to broach the college subject, and I found, as I thought I should, a ready aider and abettor at my right hand. She had been thinking of the same thing, and meant to consult me about it before speaking to his father, who would never hesitate to do anything that we thought best for the boy. It appeared that we were to be linked with him, she and I, taking our one boy on shares. So we planted our spring hopes with our sweet peas, and in the privacy of the garden I dared speak of my one hope which really budded, like my monthly rose-bush, all through the year.

She pushed back her sunbonnet to listen better.

"But don't you think," she asked meditatively, after hearing me with patience through my several episodes,

"don't you think that your boy and mine ought to be of an age?—ought to go to college together? Did you ever think of going to the asylum to choose one? There are a great many little motherless fellows there."

"Goodness, no!" I said, greatly disturbed, and sorry that I had spoken so freely to any but babes as simple and unpractical as myself. "I could never be mother then."

"No," she said frankly, "nor am I now. Joe has his own mother in heaven, and we talk about her every night. There never could be but one, you know, and you might make your boy know what mother-love of the heavenly sort is. A boy who has a mother in heaven isn't apt to stray very far away from her on earth."

I was answered. I who had cherished my own ideal of motherhood for years, stood rebuked before this real mother of a month who would never lay claim to her title.

Two weeks after Thanksgiving Mr. Timloe died, and Timmy was sent for. He had been with me for several days on account of his grandfather's severe illness, and I wondered how I could best break the heavy tidings to him. He expressed no regret at going, no sorrow for his loss. But at the door he turned back and looked straight into my eyes, and I saw the real boy for the

first time. There were no tears there, but a frightened look, as if he faced something I could not see. I rose and went with him.

Mrs. Timloe, complaining and garrulous, sat in her usual corner with the same dead odor of herbs pervading the house. It was a hard Providence, she said, that left her helpless and alone in her old age. She ought to have been taken first. Timmy greeted her shyly, but dutifully; there was no love in her heart for him to respond to.

An hour later I went into the chilly front room, darkened as is our New England custom, where lay the good pastor, a stern figure, and majestic even in death, with an old-time linen sheet drawn over him from head to foot. It was one that Mrs. Timloe had woven for herself in the days when girls were shamed if they went to a husband without a chestful of linen of their own weaving. They also had been young when life was a mystery. Of the two, death seemed least mysterious.

For a moment I forgot the child that had bound them so slightly to modern life with but one link, and that a broken one; but as I moved, my foot touched something. It was a little heap of ill-fitting clothes, with Timmy somewhere inside them, lying face downward. I closed the door softly, and was glad that Mrs. Timloe did not remember to ask after the child, though she fretted greatly about what he was to wear at the funeral.

The winter wore away, and with it Mrs. Timloe's uncomfortable life, and in the spring Timmy was left alone. His father whom he did not remember, came to take the child away, to pack up what little was worth removing, and to dispose of the house. He had married a widow with four children, and had two young boys of his own. Clearly Timmy would not be needed.

It all came over me in one blinding flash, and I had to catch my breath before I could ask, —

“Timmy — *are you my doorstep baby?*”

He knew very well what I meant, for I had told both him and Joe of my long-deferred hope.

He looked up dazed, from “David Copperfield:” —  
“I d’know.”

Then he read on. My heart sank; for though this was not the Philip of my dreams, I had at least hoped that there was something motherly about me, even to a boy of his age. How bitterly are we disappointed in ourselves when we catch side glimpses of our *ego* through other's eyes! It makes one incredulous of a welcome in the great Hereafter. He read on, a glossy lock of coal-black hair falling over his forehead as he bent low over the book. He was an olive-and-pomegranate boy, with eyes of velvety blackness. I stared into the fire. It was his last night. His father was at Deacon Thad's for old-time's sake, and faithful Chloe had gone to live with

her daughter a mile away. I thought of the echoing old house where ghosts of past days were crowded — the gray house that would go to decay with a smell of boneset, and dead air, and scorched flannel.

I was so far away that when Timmy spoke I jumped, and the tongs rattled down. He was still looking intently on the book.

“Would you let me go to school like the others?”

“Yes.”

“And learn to — swim?”

“Yes.”

“And to skate?”

“Certainly.”

“And to row a boat?”

“Of course.”

“You don’t mean it!”

“Honor bright!”

“I’ll come.”

Jacob was a bargaining creature, I remember, away back in Genesis; but he turned out better than one could expect.

“I’ll come,” Timmy said, and threw the book down with a bang. It was the sign and seal of acceptance; but I did not jump this time. I might have named other things: clothing, and Liberty spelled with a capital. But all making haste must be done slowly. He was yet but a boy in embryo.

In the morning the legal papers were made out, with but slight reluctance on the father's part.

“ We often fail by searching far and wide  
For what lies close at hand.”

I had my Doorstep Baby at last.



\* \* \* \* \*

## X

THERE was once a woman who thought she knew a good deal about children because she had been one herself. Her theoretical ways of bringing them up would have put Solomon to blush, and caused havoc among his proverbs.



Some years ago I thought I had said my last word about Philip. I was a young woman then—to those of my own generation. Now the image that looks out at me from the glass is never what I expect to see. The world looks as young and beautiful to me as it did fifty years ago, but I do not look the same to it. Where the years are gone is a mystery. It is like solid ground dropping from under one's feet. But when in December I look out on my old crooked apple-tree, with its twisted, blackened boughs, I know that it holds somewhere

within its forbidding bark the sure promise of a new life; so I take courage.

To go back into the past, when I took Rachel Timloe's boy as my very own, it seemed as simple as the easiest sums in addition. I had only to make a home for him, to feed and clothe him, and set his feet and face in the right direction. I remember that the day I adopted Cattery he came in to tell me she was walking down the garden fence, and he had turned her around for fear she would not be able to get back. My ideas about a boy were nearly as primitive. Given a home, and somebody to care for him, why should he not go on making the best sort of a man of himself, with an occasional turning of his face in the right direction by some one who knew certain points of the compass better than he? So I began in company with the Immortal Three, all heroic figures, with Charity at least a head taller than the others. When the doorstep baby that had filled and charmed my dreams became a fixed fact, the world was brighter to me than it ever could have been to Wordsworth's much-quoted boy; and there was little danger of its fading away into any prosy commonness.

First of all, like a new Adam fresh from the tree of life, the outward man had to be clothed. Nothing in town was good enough for the straight little figure, and to the scandal of the entire Vann family, all the curves

and angles of my boy's body were estimated by a first-class city tailor, and written down in a book. It was the proudest Sunday of my long life when the Clothes themselves walked into church, with a boy inside them who opened the pew door for me — the proudest, if not the serenest. His eyes shone and his cheeks were ruddy. Little freckled Joe across the aisle certainly looked a trifle countrified, but wholly unconscious in his sincere admiration of Timmy.

Those were great days! The sun danced at his rising and at his setting as well, and I sang the Beatitudes while my fire went out. Perhaps Timmy did not always remember to fill the kettle or bring in wood, and he had not the same amount of zeal in making snow paths that Joe had accustomed me to. I called him several times in the morning, and occasionally went upstairs to make sure that he heard. But breakfast would wait as well as not. Was not my very life his? And what did a late breakfast signify? He had never been waited on or petted in all his little life, and a very slight indulgence isn't bad for the best of us.

Most people would have preached lost time and morning hours that are never made up. It would have been a fine text for Mrs. Vann; but I never invited her to "sit right down in my teacup," and so we made our own laws or went without the almanac, just as we chose.

And about this time the strangest thing happened! I am almost afraid to write it down, on the principle that one should not even speak of truths which sound improbable. But this is a matter of moment, and it came to me as a sign from heaven.

Among my boy's few effects was a box that remained unopened for weeks. We knew it to be a box of books, but were engrossed at the time by all-important clothes, which shortened the perspective and threw other things out of proportion.

One leisure Saturday, namely a stormy one, when wind and rain came whirling down together, I heard a great hammering above, and went up to see what this new and strange sign of a man in the house meant. Timmy had just opened his box, and books of several sorts littered the floor. There were old almanacs, geographies, a dingy Milton, Pope's "Essay on Man," a swarm of tracts, and bundles of old letters. Were they old love letters, I wondered. Beyond these were still other books, and I was reaching out after them, when a sudden cessation of sound stopped my hand. Were you ever in a room all alone when the clock stopped ticking? In my youth I was watching one night with a friend in the last stages of consumption. Toward morning she fell asleep. I did not know that I too was asleep till a sudden silence waked me like a blow. The clock had stopped. I walked guiltily toward the bed

where the sick woman lay with one hand under her cheek. She was dead.

Timmy had picked up his mother's Bible, and sat staring at the written record of marriages, births, and deaths that grows slowly between Malachi and Matthew. As I stopped, he looked up at me as he did the day his grandfather died, and I scattered an apronful of books and hurried to him. He did not even indicate what it was that had hushed his very breathing, but as the book sagged on his knees I saw written in letters that seemed to burn on the page.

"Philip Timloe Brock.

Born Sept. 5, 18—."

The color was all gone from the boy's face. As for me, I don't know what I did. I think I opened the window to brush out a buzzing wasp, and then took pity on its bedraggled state and let it in again to dry its wings and distract me with butting its head aimlessly on every pane. I remember a cobweb across one corner of the window and a spider tangling the legs of a fly that remonstrated in the highest possible key.

Timmy shut the book without looking up, and my vision cleared. "It was all planned from the beginning!" I said. "Let us pray." And then we both burst out laughing and had hard work to find our way down-stairs. But there was a sense of something divine

and awful — a new Presence in my house that has never left it since. I shivered as I went to my own room to be alone with it.

The omission of the boy's first name was nothing strange. To the old pastor and his wife it probably meant nothing, and they in their otherwise childless age cared only to send their own name down the possible future. So in the privacy of home, when we sat alone beside the fire, I said "Philip" softly, feeling my way by slow degrees.

But when Joe made one of the party, or the Deacon and his wife and Joe three, it was Timmy as of old.

That winter there was skating on the pond, and wherever my boy went Danger followed in disguise and plotted against his life. Philip will never know how often I sat quaking by the cold garret window to watch the bobbing heads in the distance, and try to get him in focus with the old field-glass that was my father's. But my hand was shaky with cold, or something; and when a boy went down the whole field blurred. Neither will he know how I happened to be close by the bridge, with a shawl over my head, when the sudden thaw came and he and Joe went down together. And to this day I cannot tell whether I caught him first or whether it was Joe, and Joe clutched his arm. I only know that both came out together as wet and quiet as if they had simply taken a July bath. Even I did not

take cold, missing my woman's privilege, though I trailed a soaking gown all over the house till I had the boy in bed with onion draughts on his feet. The Deacon came in to say that Joe was safe, and found me stirring the fire with a palm-leaf fan.

The neighbors always contended that I was a woman of remarkable presence of mind, and Mrs. Vann had once gone so far as to say that in her opinion I was strong-minded.

The sun did not stay his course for my boy. From Mr. Craig's school for two, where he and Joe studied Latin and palmed off their constructions on innocent Jessie, the one small child of the house, the boys went to the grammar school in town, and again I had to stand on the defensive. Not only was I spoiling the parson's boy and making him feel head and shoulders above his neighbors, but I was also putting notions into the head of Deacon Thad's Joe.

Before the boys struck out into this new path I had misgivings and troubled thinkings in the night watches that had formerly been given up to sleep. The mossy old roof of the brown house seemed too low and its walls too narrow for the new, pent-up world within. And when the two were really gone to the rough-and-tumble life they coveted, the silence of the house was like the silence of life growing underground. There was a hush of expectancy in the air, an eager waiting

for something, from Monday morning to Friday night. I often caught myself walking on tiptoe in those days.

And when Friday night did come at last, with its rush of fresh-air school life filling every crevice and corner, it was good to think that the two lives had been mercifully spared one week more. Sunday too was a day of devout thanksgiving that double-barrelled shot-guns had once more refrained from going off accidentally and killing behind them. It was a great thing in a rural place to trust two boys and two guns out of sight, and I might have been indicted for murder if Providence had not graciously stepped in to save life numberless times.

What fun we had with the game, and what surprise parties in preparing it for Sunday's dinner!

Sometimes we joined forces and met at the Deacon's to discuss the chances of the hunt and dress the game, which might chance to be a red squirrel, a field mouse, or a meadow lark heavy with shot.

It was something of a task to get the boys started for school before light on Monday mornings, as the days shortened. Sunday nights belonged to the Deacon's house, and there we had our weekly "sing," one neighbor after another dropping in to listen, comment, or help. Aunt Marty played the melodeon, and the boys sang with her, while the Deacon, who could still look



over their shoulders, got in a hit-and-miss note where he could. He looked an inch or two taller than on week days, and stretched his neck above a high, shiny collar, struggling with deep bass notes that often wandered through the tune like lost sheep in strange pasture, rashly jumping the bars, and making high and frisky leaps in unexpected places.

One night I well remember when Mr. and Mrs. Craig came in and helped on the concert, and my bright-eyed boy sang tenor with the voice of an angel. As I looked across his smooth cheek, ruddy through the clear olive of his complexion, and watched its color come and go, my heart swelled till it pushed the water out at my eyes. I loved Joe as I always had, but he could never be my very own. God gave me this child as surely as he gave Samuel to Hannah's prayer. I wonder if the mother knew what to do with her boy after the prayer was answered? She had at least one definite duty, which took him to the temple. I tried to bring the temple to my boy. One Friday night when he came home I said, "Somebody has smoked all over you, Timmy. We'll have to hang these clothes out to air over night." That time I could not say Philip. When he had gone to his room and I to mine, and the clothes were airing in the woodshed, my old scheme of going to bed and going to sleep failed. Even thinking of all the Johns I knew and reciting the alphabet backward did

not keep my eyes closed. They were like jacks-in-boxes that are under compulsion. When the power was removed, up flew the lids.

Next day I said nothing; but Sunday night, when I went up to see that my boy had two blankets on his bed and that he was well tucked up, I made a proposition. We had talked over going to Europe for six months, after his four years at college; and though it seemed a wild dream, I had a fond hope that it might come true after the manner of another dream of mine. But life was shaping things for me, and I was no longer a dabbler in clay. My heart quaked, but years had given me control of my voice, and I could quietly say that after thinking the matter over in my still days, I had decided that after graduation he would be old enough to go abroad without me, and that if he would promise to use no tobacco till he was twenty-five years old, he should have in addition to his own fund the money that I had set apart for myself. The long lashes lay on his cheek for a moment, and I listened to the thumping of my heart. Then he turned his face to the wall and gave the promise, and I bade him good-night. With a mother's blind faith I trusted him. I believed that he would keep his word because I did trust him. It accorded with my cut-and-dried theory. How did I know? That I cannot tell. I do not know how I knew, any more than I know that I am immortal. It was as

if I had two souls, each acting independently and without knowledge of the other, yet bound invisibly each to each for time and eternity.

There were some things that I had to face in the Monday's silence when my two boys had forgotten their homes for the time.

Was my Philip glad to be released from me? Had the prospect of escorting an old maid through Europe, of seeing to her baggage, of shortening his steps to hers, been irksome to his thought? Joe — but Joe did not belong to me. The mother heart has pangs of its own that no man or boy can ever suffer. One dream of my life was over, and it did not matter. It had always seemed to me that Europe was farther away than heaven, and I might still hope for the nearer journey, which implied neither care nor baggage nor expense. But I wanted my boy to want me to go. That was all. I wanted him to insist upon it, that I might have the keen joy of refusing. Perhaps he would have insisted — if he had known. But that was not satisfactory. Better be content to live outside the hearts of those we love; to trust where we cannot know; to live on the south side of our lives.

And I was happy, with a real mother-happiness. The long dream was over, but I had waked to something greater and better. Another portion of my life had been freely given to my boy. It was as if a little

trickle of my blood were finding its way through his veins.

And he had promised! I would not doubt him for an instant. That bond betwixt us would keep him from a certain fast set that defiles every college. It would be a safeguard in more ways than one. The small edge of the wedge would be blunted; the little leak in the dam stopped.

At the beginning of their second winter in town the boys went to dancing-school, and the village fumed and fermented over it till spring. The corner store wondered what kind of monkeys they would turn out to be; and Deacon Thaddeus was no better than a backslider to his old neighbors.

Occasionally we mothers who had not even the title went in on pleasant Fridays, sat through the long lesson, and brought the boys home with us. Or was it they who took us in charge?

The hall was sunny and gay with short-frocked and bright-sashed little girls. Joe was perpetual motion itself. Philip moved as he was bid, reticent and upright with dignity.

There was one child in the class who always knew where Philip was; and I always knew where she was. I had seen those eyes before. They belonged to another generation, and brought back memories that I had spent the best part of my life trying to forget. Joe liked her

pretty, guileless ways, and watched her with open admiration; but she was always talking when he came near in the pauses of the dance.

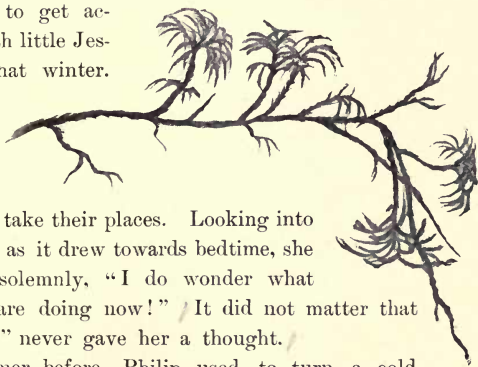
She always saw Philip, and he had no difficulty in securing her for a partner. I doubt if Joe laid it to heart. He was incapable of being slighted, because he never expected attention. Like his good father, he had a way of looking out for the neglected ones; and all the poor dancers and stupid little superfluities beamed on Joe and watched Philip from afar.

## XI

I BEGAN to get acquainted with little Jessie Craig that winter. She missed her old playmates, and there

was none to take their places. Looking into the firelight as it drew towards bedtime, she would say solemnly, "I do wonder what those boys are doing now!" It did not matter that "those boys" never gave her a thought.

The summer before, Philip used to turn a cold shoulder on her after school hours; but Joe didn't mind her tagging and endless questioning. When she tried to catch a fish in the thread of a brook that was just large enough to glisten in the sunshine, he even went so far as to bait her hook with a wriggling worm, while she shut her eyes tight. Under such temptation he sometimes slipped away unobserved; but his conscience always brought him back to explain why it was



not convenient to stay. No one expected Philip to explain, so he never had to take that trouble.

Jessie was a wonderfully *alive* child. Her eyes danced, and her voice, and her feet. Of course she must not go to dancing-school, because she was the minister's child; but often in the early winter twilight I locked the door and drew the curtains, and taught her all the steps I knew.

The firelight made wild guesses at our shadows on the wall as we went down in deep courtesies to each other. Mr. Craig would have winked at a sin so small, but I did not tell him lest he might not be able to face his parishioners when they hurled interrogations at him. And the child — bless her heart! — didn't know that it was dancing. It was just a natural kind of play to her, and she saw no ludicrous side to it.

Sometimes she went home before dusk to ask if she might stay all night. These were times when I had watched for her and laid snares to stay her feet. It would have seemed like the old days with Joe come back again, only girls are so different. She would bring her doll and undress it, and chatter to it, and sing it to sleep, and shade its eyes from the light, and hold up a warning finger if I spoke or stirred at the critical moment. Once when the doll was left behind, she went out and hunted up a stray kitten, wrapped it in a shawl, and apologized for its tail, which would not hide. It

was a new kind of child, she said, that was made with a feather duster. People were patented, of course, because no one but God ever made them; and this was a real, new patent baby.

Mr. Craig was something of an inventor, in a losing way, and Jessie's mind was like a damp sponge. After tea, when her baby, whatever it might be, was asleep, she would always come on tiptoe and draw a footstool close beside me, to beg in whispers for a story. "A really truly story of those nice times when you was a littler girl than me."

It was a good deal to keep the small maid content and happy, and I doubt if Mrs. Craig minded my taking the care off her shoulders now and then. With all her bounding life Jessie held a moody little soul in the deep part of her nature. She was always crying out in the night and refusing to be comforted, lest her mother should die before morning. "For God does let mothers die, you know, even when little girls pray hard to him."

It was useless trying to soothe her, and so we sometimes got up and roasted apples before the dying fire to drive sad thoughts away. After the apples were eaten she could sleep peacefully. When the stomach has a task of its own, the brain often takes a little breathing-spell.

There were two natures struggling in the small compass of this wisp of a child; the one merry and bright



by day, the other solemn and dark at night, feeling the immensity of the universe and the improbability of God's power to remember little children and know how much they need mothers — always mothers, mothers. Fathers were well enough in their way, but they were only fathers and irresponsible men. The fatherhood of God did not appeal to her. "I wish, oh I do wish he was a mother!" she would sigh to herself and her doll, forgetting for the moment her audience of one.

The child was a mirror that I made great discoveries in. By her aid, all blindly given, I began to see myself as others saw me. The universal idea of motherhood came home to me with power.

I have observed that when people marry quite young they assimilate more readily than when they marry late in life. The stronger character is almost sure to absorb the weaker, literally making of twain one. Sometimes the wife is It, and the husband follows meekly in her train, accepts her judgments as conclusive, thinks her thoughts, and repeats her sayings. In this case, Mr. Craig was It. And when I saw his child's devotion to an anæmic and wholly uninteresting mother, my soul took courage.

If these things be done in the green tree, why not in the dry? I studied over the great problem, and it was not a bad thing for me, because it filled the room that other puzzling thoughts were apt to crowd into and hold like unmannerly first-comers at a show.

I wished often for power to fathom the child's future. She would never be wholly happy, and she might be entirely miserable.

I longed to live till she came to womanhood; but as her small life began to push a tendril here and there among my dry twigs, a measure of dread mingled with the longing.

Jack Vann was always a terror to the child. He lurked behind trees to jump at her, or made strange sounds under cover of the leafy branches.

It was fun to catch her cherished doll away and toss it into a roadside blackberry patch. The child did not mind scratched hands or torn clothes in the brave rescue, but if dolly came to harm her passion burst forth, and dry sobs of anger would shake her from head to foot. Yet when Jack was severely punished for disobeying his father, she cried herself ill.

"*Please*, God, kill Mr. Vann!" I heard her whisper, after she had lain quietly in my bed for an hour.

"I think he's a blastyderm!" were the first words that came when she opened her eyes in the morning.

"Who, Jessie?"

"Why, Mr. Vann — course!"

"What is a 'blastyderm'?"

"I don't 'zactly know, but I guess it's something pretty bad. I heard my papa say it one day just — as — as — soft-ly."

But when that same Jack was punished much more severely at school for cruelty to a motherless boy of half his size, Jessie's eyes blazed.

"I'd just like to punish *him* myself!" she said with set teeth.

"And how should you do it Jessie?"

"*I should know how.*"

Most things Jessie knew for sure. When she was no more than two or three removes from a baby, her father was solemnly assured that she knew as much as God about some things, and a great deal more than He about dolls and mothers. She insisted that before she came down here the angels explained a few hard things to her, but the rest she knew herself.

The mother's conscience took possession of the child's sayings; but Mr. Craig said, "Let her alone;" and, as usual, the subject woman-nature obeyed, and Jessie was mercifully delivered from brooding over her own disputed thoughts. This time the father knew better than the mother that all out-of-doors was the scientific cure for self-consciousness.

All the week before Christmas Jessie and I spent our mornings in South Woods, searching for ground pine, and our evenings in making it into wreaths and ropes for the transformation of the decrepit old house.

"I s'pose," said the child, as we brushed away the light snow and pulled up beautiful trails of green, "I

s'pose you've hunted for Christmas greens as much as a hundred times, haven't you? Well, fifty then — anyway ten!"

It occurred to me that our mature thought of eternity is about as sharply defined.

This was to be a grand holiday-keeping for me. The entire dancing-class was coming out from town — the girls to spend the night at the parsonage, the boys at Deacon Thad's, where all would dine next day.

Jessie resolutely stood by me, and refused to share her room. Anybody might have it all, and welcome, after she had hidden her dolls. The child had small faith in the general conscience of a crowd of girls.

There was to be dancing at my house, which would do no harm, as I was the black sheep by courtesy of the neighborhood. There are certain obvious advantages in a hardened conscience that even the elect might envy, as they doubtless do. We who keep a Bible at hand can readily recall the justification of the publican. I am quite sure that both Mr. Craig and Deacon Thad-deus begrudged me my privilege.

The 24th of December broke crisp and concentrated as an icicle. Our fun began early in the evening, and lasted till ten o'clock, with dancing and games, and plentiful supplies of sweets that the youthful digestion never stops to parley about. The dance in all its brightness and grace wound in and out and around the

chimney, and my Philip was the hero of the hour. The girls fluttered and giggled outside the danger line of the mistletoe, and only one forgot for an instant where it hung; but she ran away as soon as Philip discovered her mistake.

The evening flew on wings as swift as those of the hunting wind that jealously tried the latches and shrieked and lamented outside; and then the bright little crowd came with all their small dancing-school airs and graces to say good-night and tell me what a perfectly lovely time they had had.

Jessie stood beside me with shining eyes, and cheeks the color of the pink carnations she wore, and gave her morsel of a hand to each one after me — all but one. When they were gone, I said, "Jessie, you missed Alice Lovell's good-night. What were you thinking about?"

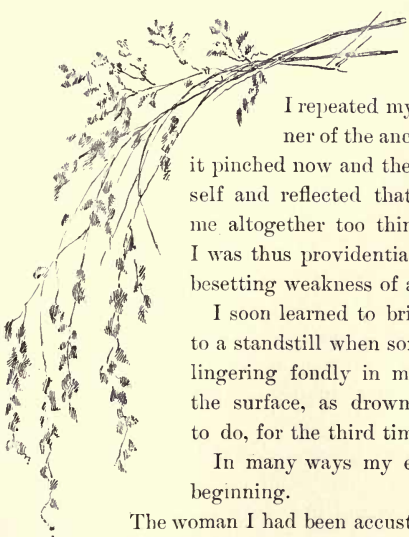
"About her!" said the child sturdily. The contrast between her stature and her expression was absurd.

"But you didn't seem to see her."

"I could if I'd wished to, but I didn't wish to."

It is a curious thing to stand outside a small life, so small that you could crush it out with one hand, and wonder what is going on behind the bars that shut you out.

## XII



PHILIP was always kind enough to check me when

I repeated myself after the manner of the ancients. And though it pinched now and then, I kept it to myself and reflected that nature had made me altogether too thin-skinned, and that I was thus providentially saved from the besetting weakness of advancing age.

I soon learned to bring myself sharply to a standstill when some tale of the past lingering fondly in my mind floated to the surface, as drowning men are said to do, for the third time.

In many ways my education was just beginning.

The woman I had been accustomed to look upon as Myself railed at and despised the demon Worry.

The Myself that listened to her own breathing when there was no Jessie to chatter ghosts of the future away, became a restless creature.

There was no use in withdrawing the curtains and looking out at the windows after tea, because there was nothing to be seen but my own fire-shine dancing in and out of the Norway spruce that kept solemn watch and ward through the still, dark hours. At night I often fell so low as to conjure up all the Johns I ever knew — John Blake, John Miller, John Kent, John — John — n, who was that other John? — climbing up the sleepy-ladder with Johns for rungs, while impish Doubts and Fears chased each other in and out among the Johns like a game of tag, winding up like the figures in ladies' chain — unlinking, threading their blind way around and among the Johns, till I was constrained to rise and roast apples for my lonely self's sake.

In some way a little of the old glamour of life was getting rubbed off, and the process was painful. As I ranged my books on the low reading-stand of a lonely evening, their makers came nearer my own life than in the old, solitary days when my horizon was close at hand.

Might not they also have worries and cares for the future — those people whom I had set apart in a little Eden of their own, where they were clothed like the flowers of the field and nourished with honey-dew and milk of Paradise? I was not a little sorry to see my gods come down to me in the likeness of men; for had I not always been on tiptoe for a glimpse of their

Olympus? The strain was less when we walked on plain old Mother Earth together, but something was lost.

In February Deacon Noadiah passed away almost imperceptibly, at the great age of ninety-nine, but continued to live on in memory as vigorously as in the flesh.

Miss Mercy Jane had the excitement of a funeral to stir the lees of her life and furnish topics for limbered conversation.

She was proud to usher the solemn-faced neighbors into the chilly north room, with its cellary flavor and darkened windows, and to turn aside a corner of the green paper curtain, that they might "see pa so neat and peaceful, not a minute over seventy in looks, and quite pretty for him."

I think we all felt a growing insecurity of life after this. It was like having a trusted oak that had stood tempest and lightning, summer heat and winter cold, yield at last to the inevitable. But when one's years are all fulfilled there is no great shock at their cessation.

Months afterwards Mercy Jane told me that she never felt alone. It had been her habit to think aloud in all the years when speech and silence were one to the Deacon; and she went about the house carrying on conversations with those who were gone as comfortably as Mr. Andrew Lang writes letters to dead authors.



Through long intimacy with their habits of mind, it was easy to frame replies for them to any every-day question, and she settled matters in this way very much as a boy in doubt flips up a cent.

Sometimes she stopped before a mirror in her daily task of dusting unused things and said, "How-d'ye do, Thankful!" "How-d'ye do, Delight!" as some look of one or another long-departed sister appeared in her own reflection. Sometimes it was her mother who looked out at her eyes; and as time went on she held ghostly conferences with the Deacon, whose spare form she had perpetuated, though with kindlier angles.

It was a comfort to her to see the family likeness emphasized as she bore it alone down the years; as if Nature, jealous of the type, had gathered up her basket of fragments with scrupulous economy and worked them over into a suggestive composite of those who had been, but no longer were.

In June a remarkable thing came to pass. It was as much discussed as a presidential election, and with quite as much difference of opinion.

Mr. Craig, always on the lookout for some investment of uneasy genius which burned in his fertile brain like money in a spendthrift's pocket, had spent his winter's leisure in devising a new rowlock which was to make his fortune. His inspiration had watched with him at night and kept him awake far longer than the

plans of his sermons, which in consequence gave his Sunday's audience the rest he so sorely needed for himself. But before applying for a patent, Mr. Craig determined to test his invention on South Pond.

The stir in the village began when he offered a prize for the fastest rowing over a mile course.

The Vann boys were eager to enter the lists, but the Squire said he wouldn't even go to see any such tomfoolery, and encourage boys and parsons in wasting time. For his part, he'd sooner give a prize for the quickest hoeing of a potato row. But the prize was only a figure of speech with him, and while the race was in progress his boys were doomed to hoe their row without a semblance of reward.

Mr. Vann's high-sounding words against the folly of the parson, which through ignorance were not really half so wicked as he intended them to be, were repeated from mouth to mouth until the alembic of the Corners distilled them at fourth proof; and little Mr. Sykes of the paper-mill said he shouldn't think any man would dare go to meeting after such talk.

This speech was promptly reported, with friendly additions, to the Squire, who retorted that he'd had his religion thorough, in the nateral way, and didn't have to go to meetin' to get it inocoolated into him.

Meanwhile the boys, Joe and Philip, with two or three others, were improving their stroke, developing

their muscle, and growing so fast over night that it was difficult for the tailor to keep up with them.

When the day appointed for the race came, I was alert and anxious, as if all the responsibility rested on me. Nor was Jessie lacking in enthusiasm. Directly after breakfast she came over with wild roses, and ox-eyed daisies, and "consider lilies" of the fields on tall stems; and we went out together and picked every one of my sweet peas with the dew still on their innocent faces.

The banks of South Pond were lined with curious spectators, for within the memory of man there had been no occasion like this.

My heart swelled and sank with pride and apprehension as we stood on the bridge together, Deacon Thaddeus and his wife, and Mrs. Craig and I, with Jessie between us. The Deacon put on his hat and took it off every half minute, and talked about any and everything but the boys. Very far off they looked, those boys who were all in all to us, when their oars made the first ripple on the deep water, and my eyes were too dim to distinguish between our boys and the others who were of no account.

But Jessie caught my hand and whispered, "Joe and Philip are ahead, and Joe is ahead of him!"

It was a broad pair of shoulders that neared the bridge, so much broader than those I thought my little

Joe owned! and he pulled heartily, like a calm, young giant who feels his own force in his veins, and knows of great reserves of strength as yet uncalled for.

Philip was rowing nervously, two boatlengths behind, and the others had given up the race, and were paddling near the banks to talk with their friends. As Joe shot under the bridge he gave us one bright glance that comprehended the group, and with slower stroke waited for Philip. I saw it, and so did Mrs. Thaddeus. The Deacon was too excited to see anything less than the pond itself. As he said afterwards, the boys looked like water-spiders, and he couldn't have told t'other from which to save his soul.

Jessie gripped my hand tighter and tighter, and for an instant the two boys pulled side by side; but as they neared the judges' stand Philip shot ahead.

There was a roar of voices, and in the silence that followed I picked up the flowers that had fallen from my hands, and led Jessie blindly along the Deacon's up-meadow road, forgetting the others.


"Where are you going?" asked the child, pulling her hand away.

"To carry my flowers to Joe."

I looked down at the little face, which was stern and set.

"*But Philip won!* I saw him!"

## X



THE years that tread on on our  
heels and peremptorily order us to  
step a little  
faster and  
make way for  
the crowd be-  
hind, soon  
pushed our  
boys out of  
the grammar-  
school and  
into college,  
and we saw  
them no more.

This, like all  
unguarded statements, is not a literal  
truth, but a sad approach to it. The  
two did take "cuts" now and then, and  
rush home for a holiday that was shortened at both  
ends. But though it was joy to see them, an uneasy  
sense of something lacking remained; and I, like Jessie,  
felt that there was nothing to be said till they were  
gone again.

Yet a mighty wave of college life seemed to sweep in with them and freshen the dry sands of life that were left a little moist long after the ebb.

Proud days were these for us, the stranded families, who fringed the deserted shore and patiently waited to learn what cargo our ventures would bring home at last.

But Jessie pouted for a day or two after our brief privileges, and said boys were no good. You just stirred up everything for them and they took it all for granted and cried for more. Jessie was fast growing aware of her own dignity and the increasing length of her gowns, though her logic was still immature. With old-time loyalty to her fading mother, she refused to be sent away to school, and Mr. Craig, making what virtue he could of the necessity, allowed her to study as she pleased. It went against his better judgment, and made her old beyond her years; but the father in him was as pleased and proud to see her triumphing over Greek roots as if she had been a labor-saving machine of his own invention.

Jessie was considered proud by the village girls, though they used another adjective in expressing their opinion; and I do not think they misjudged her. She scorned sewing societies and insisted that her father's salary did not buy the services of the family.

Poor Mrs. Craig was worried by these revolutionary opinions, but her small ratchet of protest was of little

account when the great wheel of progress was once under way. It was pleasing to see her submit meekly to the inevitable and follow her own conscience at last, though somewhat timidly, instead of consulting the conscience of Mrs. Vann, who always knew the exact right thing for other people to do.

It struck me that there are compensations now and then, even in this life, when the Squire's wife was made president of the Home Missionary Sewing Society and there allowed to have her own way and say.

The vigorous use of her unwonted prerogative reminded me of Jessie's youthful rendering of the Golden Rule — "Just as other people do to you, do you do just so to them;" only in this case "them" was represented by Mrs. Craig and not by Squire Vann, who still ruled with a high hand at home.

At college Joe was on the football team, and it was Philip's turn to be proud of him, but not with the same amount of fear and tremor as that which qualified our joy.

We went to see the first game as if it had been a funeral and we the chief mourners. Mr. Craig's presence added to the realism of the thought. Aside from his interest in Joe, his inventive turn of mind was on the lookout for something to improve, even if his last venture had as usual failed to succeed. Hope always sprang eternal in the very human breast of Mr. Craig

and led to far bolder flights than faith. But we women cared for nothing on earth save the boy who was coming into the arena to kill or be killed before our very eyes. Even brave Mrs. Thaddeus blenched as she caught sight of the men on the other side in their grotesque padding, and wished herself at home.

But Mr. Craig, with the gallant air of one town-born, leaned towards her, hat in hand, and said, "My dear madam, that young giant of yours isn't going to lose so much as an ear — much less his head."

Nor did he ; though between shutting my eyes when I saw him go under in the scrimmage and weeping for joy when he kicked the goal, I saw next to nothing of the game. But my ears were sensitive to every sound, and when a great roar like the rush of many waters swelled around me, it was a comfort to hear one chord like a blessed refrain — "*He's all right ! Nothing the matter with Joe !*"

Deacon Thaddeus insisted that I stood on the back of the seat and swung my bonnet at the crisis ; but under strong temptation even that good man has been known to make statements that he would not dare take oath to.

Philip cared nothing for athletics, nor was he as scholarly as I could have wished. But he flashed at things, and was apt to be brilliant unexpectedly.

I had hoped the wise-fool-year would not make an especial mark upon my boy ; but if it had not been for



Joe he would scarcely have pulled through. These days are not pleasant to look back upon, when my only hope was that ambition would ultimately triumph over the temptations that were dallied with and that threatened to undermine the foundations I had tried to lay.

My standard had once been set far higher than this, but we fall to levels that are not of our own choosing.

Philip's was "a mind subject to invasions — a soul that had its vandals." In Joe's face shone Vision; in Philip's lurked Success. He liked to see life and know it in all its phases.

O Rachel Timloe! forgive me for daring to think I could take care of your boy! If I had loved him like a mother, I should have been strong enough to help him.

It was Joe who watched over his thankless friend so loyally that Philip even in his darkest moods could not resent it; and presently there shone a little streak of dawn in the east, and I thanked God and took courage.

The river that flows from South Pond swells in the springtime and washes the meadows, leaving one quiet little shallow that reflects the sunshine and makes pictures of the moving clouds and waving trees, fringing its circumference with green like my mossy cup of a well that is never dry. By dint of contracting all the summer through and accepting the occasional bounty of

rain that widens its borders again, the shallow contrives to hold over until the river's spring overflow, and so year after year its small life is preserved.

It does very little good, and next to no harm, existing only by favor of its source.

This was my life in the past. Now it was in its own right a river, tormented by sharp stones, rippled by pebbles, turned aside from its chosen course, wasting itself and again gathering up its forces but always broadening towards the harbor. And often as I waked at midnight to puzzle over problems beyond me, the darkness would suddenly fill with the ripple of the Brook Song.

“Sing on among thy stones, and secretly  
Tell how the floods are all akin to thee !”

## XIV



JUNIOR PROMENADE, which is to the elect the very rose-leaf on the rounded cup of college festivities, was rather more to me this year than if I had been a pretty, invited girl.

Nothing gives edge to our pleasures like longing for them; and in my youth festivities were not thrust upon me. It is better to long and never have than to have and never long—a truth that is not apt to dawn upon us in our first half-century. So

with contented George Herbert I could say, “Now in my age I bud again;” since to chaperon Jessie was far more to me than to have been chaperoned in my youth.

For little Jessie, in the first delicate bloom of her girlhood, was going to a famous college dance, with the added joy of participating in it. The stupendousness of the undertaking, down to the last minute details,

was not apparent on the surface of things. "For the breeze that ruffles the stream knows not the depths below."

It had been solemn work, subtly guarding all the approaches to the fortress that must be undermined before the captive could be set free. At the outset there was Mr. Craig to be won over; for if his wife were first appealed to, she would weakly fall back upon the church, and I should front a solid wall with no loophole of escape.

Mr. Craig offered the line of least resistance, and for weeks I planned my attack, the brightest ideas always coming to me in the darkest nights. With the parson once enlisted on my side, I could flaunt my flag in the very face of the church, whose commander-in-chief had capitulated.

The process by which the mouse gnawed the cable in two is unpleasant to think of, but it forms a precedent. Strand by strand my cable gave way; and at last Jessie was ready, with her college colors and her simple mull gown, in which she looked like a picture-book princess. This was to be a grand surprise to the boys, who had provided a place for me, but who doubtless thought me a silly old woman to care for a thing like this, where I could only sit still and watch a crowd of strange people. There are hidden things in the hearts of the wisest and best of us that would surprise and possibly horrify our choicest friends.

When the carriage came for me at an old-fashioned boarding-house a mile away, Joe sprang out of it, and up the long steps two at a time, as hilariously as if I had been the real princess in disguise. He stood before us dazed for a moment, but when his mind could compass the scheme in all its wiliness, his pride and joy knew no bounds. We were "too — too — too — for anything!" Joe was not apt at speechmaking — and he had but one question to ask, though he tried it in various moods and tenses.

"Are you truly going to dance, Jessie?" — "How came they ever to let you dance, Jessie?" — "O Jessie! are you going to dance, really?" — "If you do dance, may I claim you first?"

The child was quietly pleased with Joe's pleasure, but I could see that she was looking forward to Philip's greater surprise and joy when he saw her among his own friends. I felt sure that she would be shy at first among so many; but, as often happened, my ideas had to be reconstructed. She had evidently thought herself over, strengthened her dignity, and practised her steps in the seclusion of the parsonage.

Dancing was as natural to her as is flight to a bird; and when Joe, very red in the face, brought her back to me after the first attempt, she smiled as demurely as if this were her usual way of spending the evening.

Joe sought out his very best friends to be introduced, and the time slipped merrily away. Philip had not yet paid his respects to me, which was disappointing; but I was quite willing to omit the ceremony when he came in sight just beyond the nearer crowd, making his way to us with Alice Lovell on his arm. She was smiling up into his handsome face as only she and her false-hearted mother could smile, and I knew that the curse had fallen upon me.

Jessie turned suddenly to Joe, who was coming back to us warm and beaming, and said, —

“Why don’t you ask me to dance?”

The color was all gone from her face, — the pretty color that became her so well, — and her eyes flashed.

“Why — what’s the matter?” stammered poor, stupid Joe, puzzled through all the intricacies of his brain, and trying to find his slow way out of the maze. “I thought you said you didn’t want to dance.”

“I didn’t, but I do!”

Joe, promptly obedient, offered his arm, doing as he always did, the first thing that came to hand; and away they went. The music was enchanting, and I half forgot in listening how long they were away. When they returned Philip was gone, and Jessie insisted that it was time for us to go home.

Joe pleaded in vain that the fun was only beginning, and that she ought not to be tired at midnight, espe-

cially as she had danced so little, and lots of the very nicest fellows were waiting to be presented.

But Jessie's mind, once made up, was like a package stamped and sealed; and she had not yet learned to submit her own will to that of others. Her time was coming, but it was not yet. For neither nature nor grace ever left a character like hers to take its own stormy way unrebuked. I, too, had stayed long enough, and did not oppose her. A little of the ignominy of defeat made the atmosphere oppressive, and our drive was a silent one.

The revelations that afflict us ancient people are like wounds that do not heal by first intention. Our anti-septics are out of reach, and we must get on as best we can.

These were only children, Philip and Jessie, yet they were playing the intricate game of life with the assurance of full-grown people. It was absurd. And then I asked leave of the years to go back to my youth and be a child again—just such a child as I had been in my brief boarding-school days, when the light that never was made an improbable world for me, peopled by impossible humanity. I well remember at our last reception the moon that shone as no moon has ever dared shine since; the roses that hung heavy with dew, and a fragrance that belonged only to the night. We filled the veranda, a group of light-hearted girls, and tossed

the roses to the men — why, they were only lads! — and leaned in at the windows to catch the words that floated out to meet us from the lips of the sweetest and subtlest singer, and did not stop to ask what charm held so many in bondage, for were we not all in love with her, the girl who could read all our simple hearts?

It was a sad song, all about love and death, and we thought we understood what they were, children like us who stood outside of life and leaned in towards it as we leaned in at the windows, but left our young, careless hearts outside!

How much older was I than Jessie when I stood on the steps a little removed from the others, and said good-by to one I was never to see again? God be thanked that childhood has no second sight, else hearts would break at once and be done with it.

Yes, we were ridiculously young, and it was all very foolish and should not have been allowed; but the strands of folly glitter all along the dull gray warp and woof of life, and so we lift it up against the sun, and let it catch the glory instead of spreading it under foot.

“ We walk this way but once, friend — hush ! ”

It was good to be at home again, to lay away the carefully prepared garments with sprigs of lavender in their folds, to take up homely duties that were emptied of all pleasure.



The gilt edge of the new life was a little tarnished already, but we would not stop to rub it up. As for the keen sense of disappointment, time would dull that too, and we must be patient. Age has always that resource. But the child Jessie? Her horizon was but a handbreadth away, yet it shut out much that I must face, and her trouble was not infinite. A barrier was growing up between us. I could not tell her the history of Alice Lovell's mother, or let her into the stifling, dark closet of my fears, out of which I myself could not find a way to light and air.

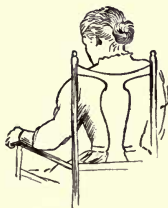
I could only tell Philip—but what could I tell Philip? I saw in the girl something of her mother's cajolery, much of her insistent beauty, her vampire absorption of the strength and devotion of her victims. But Philip's eyes were not my eyes. Must he too learn by living that which I would give my fragment of life to save him from?

What would a mother do?

When I awoke suddenly in the night the words came to me as if they were a part of my sleeping consciousness, lying in wait to perplex and baffle my burdened soul.

*What would a mother do?*

## XV



JUST now our small boys were in knickerbockers. We left them in the back yard with tops and marbles, and turned around to see them marching off the stage in dress suits on Commencement Day, carrying their diplomas with them. Life loitered in the days when I was young, and was not in such indecorous haste to make up its accounts.

Neither of the boys had a high stand in college, but Joe did his best and knew what was to come next. From the days when he dissected woodchucks and stuffed owls he had purposed to be a surgeon; and never was better choice made by a boy, or one more satisfactory to us all. For he still belonged to a composite family, made up of the original stem and one alien, dry branch; and I should claim a share in him as long as I lived — perhaps longer.

Philip could not decide what to do, but thought a year abroad might help him. There was no eagerness in his preparation for the trip, no light in his eyes when we talked it over. He did not even know what direc-

tion he might take from Liverpool. It was incomprehensible to me.

"Why, Phil, old boy, you don't care half so much about it as I do," Joe would say. "It's better to me than if I could go myself; and I lie awake nights trying to think of more jolly things for you to do. I don't believe you've half woke up to it yet. What's the matter, anyway?"

And Philip would answer guardedly, "It's easier to fall four feet than forty. You climb so high that there won't be anything left of you when the limb breaks."

I would gladly have risked the fall if it had been in my boy to climb a little higher. Dead levels may be safe, but they are terribly monotonous.

The night Philip left, when everything was packed and strapped, and I began to dread the wordless hour of waiting when one's mind is blank, he drew my chair to the fire, for it was a rainy September evening, turned down the lamp, and came and stood behind me. A great and unreasonable fear took possession of me, and I grasped the chair-arms as if they had been strong human hands.

"I want to tell you something before I go — perhaps never to come back," the boy said in a low, hard tone. "My life breaks short off here, and I sha'n't trouble you any more. Don't stop me; I must speak now, and you'll have to hear me. You did the best you could for

me when I was a little fellow, and I hope you'll have your reward, though you'd have done better if you had left me to die on your doorstep. Nobody had tried to love me before, and my training spoiled my faith in humanity. I never could be a boy like other boys. I hated to be watched. I hated to be kept in like a girl. I hated to be nagged at. I hated the clothes I wore.

"I was humiliated every day of my life, but nobody guessed it — not even my heavenly-minded grandfather, who would have loved me if he'd known how. The boys made fun of me, and they'd a right to; but it made me hate them. They couldn't guess how it hurt; but boys are cruel animals, anyway. I doubted everybody's motives, even yours and Joe's. Your taking me was a thankless job, and now you must just wash your hands of me and let me go, and be satisfied if I don't carry off your silver. No, don't try to speak! Let me have my say this time; it won't take long. I know what a fool I've been; how I've squandered your money, and wasted my life, and lost my soul, if I ever had one. I know how I drank and gambled, like the cur I was, though I did keep my promise about smoking; but I truly hoped to pay back a little of what I owed you when I'd seen enough of life. No — don't say you won't have it. You shall have it! That's all I happen to be living for just now, and if you care to

keep me alive just let me go my own way. There's a little decency left in me, I suppose, because I want to be honest at last. Are you listening?"

Was I listening, indeed!

"In April I was married to Alice Lovell. To-day I was to claim her. Of course it was like the fool I am to run the risk of being expelled from college, but I wanted to make sure of her. She might have had her pick of a dozen better men, but I believed every word she said. It was Bible truth to me, and sacred. We had a great secret to keep, but she was out of town, travelling most of the time. Once or twice we met on the street like ordinary acquaintances. Last month she married that blackguard Moorehouse, a man we all cut on the street—even I. There have been things to think of that took the romance out of my trip—blasted it out.

"They were married in church, with flowers and bridesmaids, and things of that sort, and prayers, too—anything to be religious—and he and his fortune have gone abroad with her. You warned me; but you were you and she was she. I remember you used to put the moths out at the window when they flew around the lamp, but they always came back to singe their wings. It was just as good of you, but it didn't save them. And you couldn't know anything about Alice.

"It was not a clergyman who married us, but a good

friend of her own who enjoyed the joke. May Heaven reward her ! ”

The tone of his voice had not changed from first to last. There was not even a trace of resentment in it. The flame of life had dropped out to ashes so soon ; the infinite pity of it ! The boat had stranded with all sails set.

My hands were rigid on the chair arms. The fire had flickered down to embers.

“ Now, Philip,” I said, and I set my teeth to steady my voice, “ you must hear me. I am not going to begin away back when I took you for my very own and prayed God to give you a happy life. Let all that go. But I want to tell you that there was a time when I too was young.

“ The mother of your Alice took from me all that made happiness possible, and then broke the heart her falsehood had wiled away from me. If her career had only ended there, my poor boy ! But after years of wandering as an actress, she married an old man, spent his fortune, and left him with this child who is trying to follow in her accursed footsteps.”

Philip started. He was not used to such words from me.

“ Is she dead ? ” he asked without a shadow of interest.

“ She was living two years ago.”

Carriage-wheels stopped at the gate; the steamer-trunk was carried out. He picked up his bag, looked at the room, the dying fire, the yellow-haired baby on the mantel, but not at me. Was his mind travelling over the way he had come, but by which he could never return?

“Oh, my boy, my boy! how can I let you go?”

“Don’t give me a thought,” he said. “I’m not worth it. Good-by.”

I held his cold hand, and looked into the dear face I had loved so long and so well, but there was no answering sign of love in it. The door shut with a jar; there was a pause; then the wheels grated as they turned, and I listened till the last sound died out and left me alone in a dark, cold world. Then I resolutely re-kindled my fire and drew my lonely chair close before it, for I was shivering from head to foot. I thought I was dying, and for one selfish moment it was a welcome thought. I had yet to learn that grief does not kill.

When Mary the mother of our Lord saw her Son on the cross, then and not until then did she suffer the pangs of motherhood. So says the legend, and I like to think it true. In that night of my long agony, wrestling alone with myself, I went down into the deepest depths that my humanity can fathom. When morning broke the struggle was over only because I

could endure no more. Why had I not prayed to be delivered from this night? And then, for the first time in my long life did I realize my own ideal of motherhood. From those awful depths I brought back something—God alone knows what, for my brain was weak and sore; but it was something that kept me alive.

Jessie was with me for weeks, and Joe came whenever he could spare time from his work. Good Deacon Thaddeus and his wife would have me go home with them, and felt it sorely when I refused. But there was never an evening when I did not set a light in the window; never a winter night so cold that my fire did not burn brightly with my curtains wide open, a silent welcome for the wanderer who might come back. He could see the glow for a long way down the road, and it is not in human nature to turn away from such an appeal.

Sometimes as I was feeling my blind way slowly back to life, Miss Mercy Jane would bring her knitting-work and sit down beside me, trying to comfort me in an old-fashioned way. If I would only boil up strengthening things and take them regular, no matter if I didn't care for victuals, I shouldn't feel so bad. I was more than welcome to the spring bitters pa left. There was all of half a bottle on the kitchen shelf, and a great spoonful before eating made him feel real spry, and just as hungry as a badger. But when I asked how hungry



a badger was, she had to confess that she really didn't know: pa used to say so; and she judged by his appetite that it must have been pretty poor and skimpy, whatever a badger was, till somebody fed it.

When the badger subject was ended for want of further knowledge, she returned to the boy subject, which might have suggested itself in that connection. If pa had said it once, he had said it as much as twenty times, that 'twas no use women's trying to bring up boys. They generally went to the bad, and no thanks to anybody but themselves. Give 'em rope enough and they'd manage to swing themselves. Keep 'em to work, and like as not they'd run away to sea where nobody knew what they had to eat, and as for drink, they had to take grog because the water was so salty that if they tried to make tea with it the kettle was rusted out in no time. So she had heard tell; and it wasn't strange if they did come back drinking men. If it wasn't wicked to say so, it did seem as if the Lord would have thought of that when he put the salt in.

Mercy Jane would muse on her ideas as if they were a source of light and comfort to her; but in time the subject that suggested them would return in full force, and often with more aggressiveness than at first. Human nature was mighty unreliable stuff, and it was a mercy that any of us had been kept from state's prison. There was Jack Vann, now, working on the

road out West with a chain gang, which must be pretty bad and considerable humbling to the Vann pride.

When I added that he got fresh air, which he couldn't have in a cell, and that it probably gave him an appetite without any need of bitters, Mercy Jane looked over her spectacles at me as if she suspected that I was wandering in my mind, and repeated her proposition that the family pride must be humbled.

But though I knew better, it was not for me to gain-say her.

Jack Vann had taken pains all along that none of his family should commit the sin of pride on his account.

The Squire did not feel it his duty to call upon me, which omission I set down on my mental list of things to be thankful for. But Mrs. Vann often ran in to ask in a lively way what I heard from that boy, and to suggest various unpleasant things that might easily have happened to him.

She was sorry to say that she had one black sheep, and could sympathize with me; but when you hadn't any more, black or white, you was apt to take it hard. She didn't find out for quite a spell as anything was wrong, but by asking 'round she heard that it was quite common talk down to The Corners, so 'twasn't any harm to speak to me about it. It was not the first time that I had been cordially invited to tell all I knew or guessed about my dear wanderer, but on this particular

evening it proved to be the last, for Jessie, who was providentially at hand, opened the door. If it had been I, Mrs. Vann would have ignored it; but Jessie's eyes had a compelling way, and the Squire's wife rose before the light of them as hurriedly as if her husband had given the word to forward march.

"If that woman comes here again," said Jessie, with her back against the door, "I'll sweep her out with the broom!"

Nor could I for a long time make the child understand that these bitter things were my only available tonics, and that I came to myself far sooner than if my blood had not been stirred. Sometimes the victim of narcotic poison has to be whipped back to life, however much his friends may cry out against the inhumanity of the process.

## XVI



THE reconstruction of a life is necessarily a slow and tedious process. He who makes over an old house, even, knows what an unreasonable time it takes the plaster to dry, and how each workman interferes with every other one, putting back the work and breaking into that already done, so that the simplest things have to be gone over and over again, until he repents him of the undertaking, and wishes he had been content with the old house as it was.

My life was simple enough till I began its reconstruction with something far more intricate than wood and plaster. Just at present its complexity was something awful to think of. It was not a choice now of old house or new. One does not question a cyclone that has taken shape as to its mission. Does a tree struggle against its growth, I wonder? Would it choose to be a sapling always, bowing to every breeze and recovering again, sung to by birds but never offering branches for them to nest in? Does the bark creak with the inner strain when the sap goes up mightily at the urgent

call of springtime, forcing it to make room and more room?

God had given me the desire of my heart, as he gave food to his people in the wilderness; but would he therefore send leanness into my soul?

I seemed to feel only the dust of the great world as it roared by and left me for dead on a contemptible battle-field. Why had I not been content with my own happy life, momentous to me, and saved in its serenity from the wear and tear of years?

But I deliberately chose my own discipline. Heaven did not inflict it. Was I punished for craving that which did not belong to me? No answer.

In the dull hours when vitality was lowest and the earth sank slowly beneath my feet as if it had been unstable as water, the words, "He that saveth his life shall lose it," came back like something heard ages ago under similar circumstances and forgotten. With a great rushing sound and momentary oblivion they surged through my tired brain in a high, shrill key, and left me like a rag of seaweed cast up on a barren shore.

In those days I would forget for a moment that Jessie was with me, and talk aloud as simply as Mercy Jane herself. We could not speak of Philip at first, though afterwards he was our one theme. But from some wandering word Jessie caught the idea that tidings from

him might save my life ; so of her own accord she wrote to his bankers, and in due time heard that he was still in London.

Until this time my mind had no pivot, but upon this small point it concentrated, and my working theory started. The boy was doing something ; he had some reason for his silence.

Then my old-time theories came to my aid, and were to me what the legendary straw is to the drowning man. Though my dear Philip has disproved them all, I would still catch at them and hold on by sheer force of habit. And then I began to reason that the boy might have done worse. The pity of it that this should be our consolation, when the years are spent, the seed sown, the insolent crop of tares ready to blossom ! And then, with reason beginning to adjust itself once more, I fell so low as to complain. What could I have done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it ? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes ? O Prophet of the Highest ! our little human cry for our own in these latter days is as bitter as was your mighty wail for a nation when the world was young.

My boy was not born to me ; it was I who was born to him, by every holy tie a mother, with the love all on my side. Whatever his future might be, that way my life lay ; and so out of the heart of the darkness I took

courage, expecting nothing, asking only for strength to do my part. If I had known by ever so small a sign that Philip loved me, it would have been a sure clew in my feeble hands to lead me back to life. But I struggled back by an unknown way; and when my gnarly apple-tree blossomed again and Jessie set my chair under its shadow and led me to it, I knew that life was on its way once more, because I rebelled at second childhood. My world was turning towards the sunrise again; somewhat heavily, to be sure, and with shuddering pauses. I had risen high enough already to speculate about my breakfast, and even at times to feel a human interest in my neighbors' affairs. The very day that my apple-tree seemed to blossom just for me came a cablegram from Philip which made the sea no wider than South Pond where it becomes a river again. If it had been a letter!

"But oh, dear Unreasonable," whispered Jessie at my elbow, "what if it hadn't been anything!"

It was the same dear child grown wise through love and sympathy, who brought out my small round table, and set the pink-and-gilt sprigged china on it, with the Mayflower tea-caddy and the tall decanter of Madeira that had been ripening for a lifetime. As she made the tea and set the cup before me with one of my own mother's spoons worn on the right side of the bowl, I said:

"These shall be yours, dear child, when I'm gone; these spoons, and the tea-caddy, and the little cups with their elbows out."

"Indeed," said Jessie hotly, and her fingers trembled as she fastened a spray of apple-buds to my gown — "indeed, you're not going anywhere; and as for Philip's things, I won't touch one of them if you go this minute!"

And that is how we began to talk about him. Jessie insisted that we should hear from him before long; that he would write as soon as he had something special to tell.

For she knew there was something special, or he couldn't have kept still so long. There wasn't the least thing strange about it, and if it wasn't too rude she should say that I ought to be ashamed to spend my time imagining things. Then she struck another vein. Very likely the Queen had sent for him and begged him not to leave London, because nobody over there could ever look like him, and they needed ornamental people at court to keep their courage up. She had doubtless offered him a star and a garter, and he might be declining with thanks at this very minute. "I know you think so yourself," she added, "for you are actually smiling with proper pride at last, in your democrat."

Mr. Craig said I might as well adopt Jessie out and out for all the claim they seemed to have on her, but



demurred when I spoke of drawing up the papers on the spot.

Joe had no vacation this summer, and hospital work kept him busy seven days in the week — eight, the deacon said, who could not be reconciled to the long separation, and at last found it necessary to go to town in the midst of haying.

He came home so brimful of new ideas about operations and antiseptics, and Joe's using a sharp knife that had a sort of scalping name, and never flinching any more than if it had just been a razor on his own face, that Mrs. Thaddeus said he woke her in the middle of the night to tell how he shivered when he heard that thing cut right into a man's flesh just like ripping a piece of cotton cloth, and Joe never so much as winked. If pride could kill a man like its physical symbol, dropsy, the good deacon must have died before morning.

Mrs. Vann chose her moments with discretion, and looked in to let me know that she was not affronted whenever Jessie was away, which was seldom. It made me laugh all by myself when she was gone to see her afraid of a child who was less than half her size and barely a third of her age.

She had always something to say about her boys, who had been frightened into obedience, and saved from destruction, apparently, by the loss of one. The Presi-

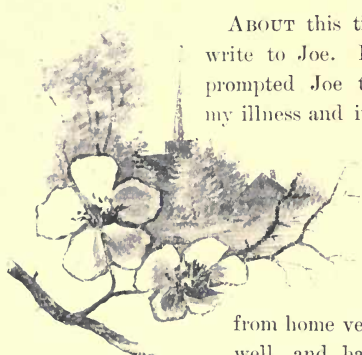
dent of the Home Missionary Society wiped away a natural tear now and then when there was time before Jessie appeared, and didn't know whatever would become of Jack, for his father never'd have him home again amongst the other boys, even if he did come back some time ; which no doubt gave her a certain sense of relief by shifting the responsibility.

Her grief was never so profound that she could not discuss it with any one who would listen, from the church porch to the kitchen door ; and I doubt, therefore, if it yielded her any of the peaceable fruits of righteousness which are the satisfactory crop of seed sown in love and humbleness.

Miss Mercy Jane brought me not only spring bitters, but a great spoon as well, lest mine should be skimpy in the measure, and stood by to see that I took every poured-out drop.

So when the apple-tree began to have daily charms for me, and I could raise myself with no help but that of the chair arms, she declared to goodness that it was nothing short of a meracle, and had ought to be put into the paper. She even suggested that my picture wouldn't look bad along with it ; but I turned a deaf ear to such wholesale flattery, and the bitters did their duty like the beneficent forces of nature, without the aid of trumpet or shawm or pictorial illumination.

## XVII



ABOUT this time Philip began to write to Joe. I suspect that Jessie prompted Joe to let him know of my illness and its cause. But if my guessing is true, the secret was well kept. The letters were mere notes, saying that he wanted to hear

from home very often, that he was well, and hard at work. They always closed with "love to my dear," a name he had never called me by, but which was mine from this time onward. In his childhood I was never named. Chary of speech from the first, he said briefly what he had to say as if he were thinking aloud.

It was three years from the time he went away before my letter came — the letter that I had expected with confidence summer and winter since I knew that he had not forgotten his old home. There was so much in it touching me, so much that blinded and choked me, that

I hesitate about writing it down here. But the more I think of it the clearer it is to me that in no other way can things be made to appear in their true light. It must be borne in mind all along that my dear boy could never know what real mother-love is, his own mother dying so young.

The letter shames me for every disloyal thought of him, and humbles me with a sense of my deep unworthiness in ever questioning the fact that what we most earnestly desire of best things shall be ours if we can only wait long enough. But it shows that he really looked upon me as a mother, and like one's own child refused to see flaws that are patent to every one else.

Here is the letter word for word as it came to me on a Wednesday, the fifteenth day of May, at ten minutes past six o'clock, while I was sitting at my tea-table:—

“MY BLESSED, MORE THAN MOTHER: There are no words of mine that can tell you all I want to say. The past is past. I am trying to forget all the meanness and wickedness of it, but I can't ask you to do the same. Only try to believe in me a little, and I will try hard to prove what I want you to believe by my life.

“It's of no use to tell you how I felt that night. You couldn't believe it if I did. I had to keep it all in — the hell that was raging inside. It was *hold on or go mad*. You can't know how a man feels — for I was a man full grown, with more pride than any man ought to have — to be made a laughing-stock by his classmates, to have his name stand for all that is weak and contemptible. Let it pass. It is too soon to write about that. Joe always stood by me through thick and thin. There were times when I hated him for it and tried

to shake him off. I never can forget in this world or the next what he has been to me.

"As for *her*—she passed entirely out of my life then. I was almost sorry for Moorehouse when I heard of them in Florence, and knew what a life she was leading him. He did care for her, or he wouldn't have blown his brains out when she left him. In a year she too was gone to her judgment. I put her out of my thoughts. It was all a wild dream. The ignominy of it was maddening, but that too is past.

"And now, do you know, my dear, what saved me? I had to get far away in order to see myself. One midnight, all alone on the deck of the steamer, I got myself into focus. Pray God I may never do that same thing again! But I needed it then. If it had not been for you, I should have flung myself away then and there. The sea tempted me, and my disgrace tempted me. But as I leaned over the rail and saw the moonlight slip from crest to crest of the waves, I heard your voice as plainly as if you had been in sight—no words, only your voice. I don't want you to think there was anything supernatural about it. Probably the tone of it lingered in my ears, and helped my conscience that was just coming to life. But it was like a sign from heaven; and in that moment, if I had been dying, I could not have realized more clearly what you have been to me. Before that moment there was nothing in me that could appreciate you. I don't believe I ever cried before in my life. I'm proud to tell you this. You will try to believe I'm different, won't you? From that time I have planned and worked for you, and it has kept me alive. Rather it kept me till life could get hold of me again.

"No matter what I did at first. It was honest, hard work, good for the muscles; and in time they helped the brain.

"Then I compiled books, and was so useful to the firm that they made it worth my while to stay on.

"All this time I couldn't tell you. I wanted to do something more—some great thing to prove my shame and my repentance. If I could show you the inside of my mind and heart, you wouldn't

be so shocked at what I'm going to say. You won't believe it at first, because you think you know me. But you can't ever know me as I know myself—as if I were the little fellow you used to tuck up nights.

“Try to believe in me a little. It will help me more than the Bible. For I never knew anything in the world like your love for me. I couldn't go wrong after I grew till I was able to realize that.

*“I am going to preach.*

“And it won't be just preaching either, for I have practised too. And now I must tell some poor devil how to crawl up higher. If I hadn't been in the pit myself, don't you see, I shouldn't know what was down there. And I do think I've got the grip to pull men out. If once I do get hold of a man, I never'll let go, any more than you did of me, if it drags me in too; and just so long as a man has a hold on God's grace and his own free will, he can always get out again.

“Next year I'm coming back to you with a big bag full of gold, and then you'll know for certain that I'm your loving PHILIP.”

Jessie said she had heard of people's hair growing white in a single night, but she never thought I could be a girl again in a single day. But Jessie's eyes were holden, and did not respond clearly to impressions that evening.

As I think of it now, the whole year was spent in preparation for the coming of my boy. No Coming of Arthur could be so much to the world at large as was this to mine. I urged my sweet peas and sowed morning-glories like the sand by the seashore, and had solid rods of mignonette and alyssum and heliotrope—flowers with souls. And they responded to the desire

of my heart. If the very stars in their courses fought against Sisera, why should not nature's forces be enlisted for once on my side? For this, my son, was dead and is alive again; was lost and is found.

There was a new light in Philip's face when he opened the door, as if he had but just gone out, and came softly in and stood behind my chair—a light that was not born with his physical being. He looked ten years older than when I saw him last.

“And Time had taken away the seal  
That held the portals of his speech.”

We could talk together now; we could be silent together.

I called my neighbors in, like the hasty woman in Scripture who had found her lost piece of silver, and who wanted them all to know it and laugh with her. Deacon Thaddeus came with tears running from his eyes, and knelt right down in the middle of the room and thanked God for the boy. It was the one eloquent prayer of his life without a break in it.

Mr. and Mrs. Craig were there; and the parson, who was never known to be at a loss for words wherewith to express every shade of emotion, could only say, “Well, well, well!” Mrs. Craig sniffed softly in a corner, and Jessie, like Martha of old, flew around and set the table, and would have been glad to “kill something.” As it

was she prepared the way for a week's fast, and joy spoiled no appetite that night.

Mrs. Craig proposed a donation party for next day; but that was only because she was a minister's wife, and didn't know how to take her pleasure whole, without a thought of the morrow. So I forgave her, and we had manna or its equivalent—honey and crackers—for breakfast. It was all bread from heaven to me.

Philip stayed six weeks, and then I went back with him for a year. It sounds very practical as I write it, but the great joy in my heart has made all other pleasures small. When one holds the earth and all heaven in fee simple, one doesn't whimper for a garden spot across the sea.

At first I refused Philip's proposition, but when he said with authority that he would not go without me, I had to yield.

It was the final proof of motherhood: I had come to obey my child. Nor would Jessie hear of my staying at home. She said it would be downright cruelty to let Philip go back to his lonely life, and she couldn't think so meanly of me as to believe I ever meant it.

It was she who looked over my wardrobe, who shook out and modernized my Junior Promenade gown, "for the Queen's sake," and with Philip's help packed my travelling-bag with every known aid to comfort.



I had a little maid to look after the house while we stayed, and Mrs. Thaddeus begged to take charge of it while we were away. So I felt that the brown shell would be secure from moth and mould, and that I need not carry it on my back all over Europe. For we did not stop in London; but I was tenderly watched over throughout the misery of a Channel passage, and left for a two weeks' rest in a quiet little town in Brittany, the home of "Guenn." They who have been abroad wince at the threadbare tale of one's journeyings, and they who stay at home have read more than I could tell in a week, so neither shall be bored with a recital of the surprises and delights that filled my too brief year.

When I glance over these yellowing leaves, it seems as if they were chiefly a record of apple-blossoms and hearth-fires. Still, one might have a less agreeable calendar to mark the passage of the years, so I choose to give them honorable mention as often as they appear. But I shall write no more of them nor of the brown house itself. I have taken a new lease of life, and shall be greatly occupied with living. The dear old home has also grown young — not in outward form, for neither Philip nor I could suffer that. But within it is luxurious beyond the thought of any lavish nest-decorator, and finer than the hang-birds' home that swings in sight of my window. It is growing from the inside like a tree.

The ferns wave long and green among the mosses that line my well, for I watered them through the long dry summer when my neighbors were asleep, that nothing might be lacking when my boy came to his own again.

My children, Philip and Jessie, are just now gone for a little holiday trip before they begin their lifework together. I bade them good-by an hour ago. Philip says there is enough to do on this side the world, even no farther away than New York, and that ragged folk are not the only ones who need a helping hand. He is even heretic enough to say that many in the front pews of the most orthodox churches need to be saved as by fire.

Our own little church is still gay with thousands of apple-blossoms, sweet as love and beautiful as hope.

Squire Vann couldn't understand why the apple crop should be cut off for one wedding, and stopped Deacon Thaddeus at the church door to say that so far as steady work went, he'd as soon marry a girl of his to a charcoal-burner as to a preacher, and save all this fuss and feathers.

But he went in and took the best seat as willingly as if he had given his consent to the transaction.

Everybody was there to see my pride in my very own. I suppose they looked like any ordinary bride and groom to those who did not love them, but

“Never yet since high in Paradise  
O'er the four rivers the first roses blew,  
Came purer pleasure unto mortal kind”

than that which came unsought to me on this bright fifteenth day of May.

Jessie had never in all her life cared for any one but Philip. Never for an instant had she lost faith in him; never for an instant would she lose faith in him. Her nature was stanch and loyal to the core.

Mr. Craig prayed God to grant that they might mercifully grow old together, which was the very best thing he could have remembered, and, like the majority of quotations, far better than anything original.

We all lingered on the church steps as they drove away—lingered to talk learnedly about the weather and the new schoolteacher, and Miss Mercy Jane's neuralgia, and similar things that might have happened in Jupiter for all the interest we could find in them, till Joe came back to sit before the altar for a little while with me, and fill his soul with the peace and beauty of the hour. For it was like what we imagine of the glorious calm of heaven when earth's work is finished, its discords and harmonies stilled together, and greater things are awaiting their turn to enlarge our souls. It came to me then and there that the warp of life, strong and enduring, is hidden from sight by the more intricate woof that carries the pattern. If our vision is clear

enough, we can always find the sombre thread woven side by side with the blues and golds, the scarlets and purples; crossing and recrossing, dimming the lustre here and there, but in the end taking nothing from the strength and real beauty of the brightest fabric. And so it shall be written down here, that although I alone am grieved and privileged to know it, my dear Joe has loved Jessie all his life.

THE END.













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